

The Paradox of Democratic Media: Platform Logic and the Failure of Policy Conversion in Indonesia's 17+8 Movement

Alif Firdaus Zamzam ¹; Nurul Laili ²

^{1,2} Universitas Islam Darul 'Ulum

Correspondence Email: alifzamzam@unisda.ac.id

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Abstract

Indonesia experienced a massive wave of nationwide mass mobilization, triggered by the disparity between political elites' institutional privileges and the economic pressures faced by lower- and middle-income groups, and further intensified by the circulation of digital narratives across social media. This article aims to examine the fundamental paradox underlying the movement: its capacity to rapidly unite cross-class demands coexisted, rather than corresponded proportionally, with its failure to translate those demands into binding public policy. The study adopts a qualitative approach using a library research design combined with document analysis and a critical literature review. The analysis draws on academic literature, institutional documents, independent monitoring reports, and media coverage documenting the escalation of the 17+8 Movement from 25 August to 5 September 2025. The analysis proceeded in three stages: mapping the structure of the action network, tracing patterns of declining hashtag visibility, and interpreting the findings within a paradoxical democracy framework. The findings indicate that the 17+8 Movement constituted a prototype of a mass-based action network without a dominant brokering organization, rendering it vulnerable to digital repression and shifts in algorithmically mediated attention once the viral momentum subsided. The failure of policy conversion is therefore understood not as a failure of digital activism itself, but as a structural failure at the conversion stage, resulting from a digital ecosystem that remains insufficiently connected to institutional channels capable of accommodating participatory energy before public attention shifts to other issues.

Keywords: Platform logic; Democratic paradox; Policy conversion; 17+8 Movement; Digital media

Introduction

At the end of August 2025, Indonesia witnessed a manifestation of the contemporary democratic paradox through a nationwide wave of mass mobilization. The movement was triggered by the convergence of two sociopolitical dynamics: public discourse surrounding adjustments to the allowances and institutional benefits of members of the House of Representatives and escalating economic pressures experienced by lower- and middle-income groups (Sholikin, 2019). This disparity was starkly represented in digital discourse, where visual narratives depicting the elite lifestyles of public officials were juxtaposed with the economic vulnerability experienced by ordinary citizens and subsequently amplified extensively through social media networks. Public dissatisfaction, initially articulated at the individual level on X, Instagram, and TikTok, rapidly transformed into collective action in physical spaces. The movement subsequently evolved into the consolidation of formal civic demands encompassing a series of short-term tactical demands and a longer-term structural reform agenda (Maharani, 2025).

The movement is noteworthy not only in terms of the scale and speed of its escalation but also with regard to the organizational structure through which its demands were articulated. As noted by Putra et al. (2025), the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong (2014) and South Korea's Emergency Martial Law Resistance Movement (2024), alongside Muliono's (2026) findings on digital mobilization in the 2025 mass protests in Pati Regency as a domestic comparative case, exhibit similar characteristics of mobilization without a single centralized leadership. The movement was rooted in cross-cutting networks involving digital communities, student associations, independent journalists, and civil society organizations concerned with freedom of expression and human rights advocacy. The participation of several public figures further expanded the reach and resonance of the digital campaign hashtags without positioning them as leaders of the movement in a conventional hierarchical sense. This network-based pattern of mass mobilization can be interpreted, within scholarship on digital activism, as a manifestation of what Bennett and Segerberg (2012) conceptualize as the logic of connective action.

Independent monitoring data reveal a problematic landscape of outcomes. A monitoring report by Bijakmemantau.id (2026) indicates that the state's institutional response to the consensus of public demands has tended to be partial and incremental. Policy measures undertaken by political authorities, including the moratorium on adjustments to institutional benefits and deliberations on several key regulations, have largely remained at the stage of formal-administrative processes without comprehensive substantive fulfillment. This gap underscores a significant divide between the intensity of public articulation and the responsiveness of the formal political system (Setiawan et al., 2025).

This study proceeds from the premise that the capacity of digital media to expand mobilization does not automatically translate into changes in public policy. This constitutes the central paradox of digital democracy. Bennett and Segerberg's framework primarily explains the mechanisms through which mobilization occurs but does not adequately account for how such mobilization is converted into influence over state decision-making processes. In other words, while the theory offers

considerable explanatory power regarding the dynamics of mobilization, it remains less equipped to explain the failure to transform public pressure into institutional change.

This paradox can be understood through the divergence between the logic of platform connectivity and the logic of political institutions. Digital platforms operate through rapid information distribution, virality, content personalization, and algorithmic optimization of public attention (Sholikin, 2025). By contrast, public policymaking operates through institutional mechanisms that require political representation, inter-actor negotiation, legal procedures, and organizational capacity to sustain political pressure over time. This institutional mismatch between the two logics means that extensive digital mobilization does not necessarily translate into substantive policy change.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a qualitative library research design combined with document analysis and a critical literature review to examine the escalation of the 17+8 Movement in Indonesia during August–September 2025. This period was selected to

encompass the emergence of mobilization, the intensification of demand articulation, the crystallization of the 17+8 People's Demands, and the subsequent entry of these demands into the institutional arena. Social media data are not treated as primary data directly collected by the researchers; rather, findings on digital engagement, sentiment, and mobilization patterns reported in previous studies are used as secondary documentary evidence. Accordingly, the study seeks to develop a critical synthesis of the relationship between connective action, platform logic, public mobilization, and policy conversion.

The research draws on academic literature, official government and parliamentary documents, independent monitoring reports, media coverage, and previous empirical studies. Sources were purposively selected based on their relevance to and credibility regarding the 17+8 Movement. Academic literature was used to construct the theoretical framework, while institutional documents, monitoring reports, and media coverage were employed to reconstruct the movement's chronology, mobilization patterns, and institutional responses to its demands.

The analysis proceeded through three sequential and interconnected stages. First, the study mapped the organizational structure and mobilization patterns of the 17+8 Movement using the typology proposed by Bennett and Segerberg (2012). Second, these findings were interpreted through the concept of platform logic. Third, policy conversion was examined by comparing the 17+8 demands with documented institutional responses and developments in the policy process. These three stages were subsequently integrated through critical interpretive synthesis. This synthesis provided the basis for conceptualizing the Policy Conversion Gap, defined as the discrepancy between the capacity of digitally networked mobilization to generate visibility, participation, and demand consolidation and its capacity to produce sustained institutional and policy change.

Results and Discussion

1. The Initial Model of Crowd-Enabled Connective Action

The development of digital media has transformed the character of political mobilization from collective models dependent on formal organizations toward more flexible, personalized, and networked forms of participation.

Bennett and Segerberg explain this transformation through the Logic of Connective Action, arguing that collective action in the digital era is no longer driven primarily by organizational identity, but by processes of connectivity that enable individuals to participate through personalized content sharing (Bennett & Livingston, 2025). Unlike the classical logic of collective action, which positions organizations as the primary actors coordinating movements, connective action develops through the circulation of information across digital platforms, enabling individuals to function simultaneously as producers and disseminators of political narratives.

In this context, social media functions as an organizational infrastructure through organizationally enabled networks, facilitating coordination without hierarchical leadership structures. Digital platforms provide algorithmically mediated mechanisms for the rapid circulation of information through hashtags, reposts, and content recommendations (Pearl, 2018), thereby substantially reducing the coordination costs of mobilization compared with conventional movements. Social media also facilitates information dissemination, community building, enhanced visibility, action coordination,

and connections among individuals who are unable to participate physically (Showden et al., 2025). Consequently, public participation can expand rapidly within a short period even in the absence of established social or political organizations.

Bennett and Segerberg (2012) draw an important distinction between the classical logic of collective action and the logic of connective action that has emerged alongside the expansion of digital media. As articulated in the Olsonian tradition, collective action relies on formal organizations to mobilize resources, construct shared collective identities, and address the free-rider problem through clearly defined membership structures (Sholikin, 2026). Connective action, by contrast, does not require a uniform collective identity or a strong organizational structure. Instead, it relies on personal action frames—action frames that can be readily personalized and recirculated by individuals according to their own narratives while remaining connected through shared digital symbols such as hashtags.

Bennett and Segerberg (2012) distinguish three forms of connective action: organizationally brokered networks, which are fully managed by

formal organizations; organizationally enabled networks, which combine organizational infrastructures with personalized participation; and crowd-enabled networks, which are driven largely by digital technologies with limited involvement from brokering organizations. In the latter configuration, mobilization depends predominantly on digital networks in the absence of a dominant organizing body. An aspect often overlooked in popular interpretations of the theory is that Bennett and Segerberg do not regard connective action as inherently superior to conventional collective action. Rather, they emphasize that crowd-enabled networks may be particularly vulnerable precisely because they lack organizational structures capable of sustaining negotiations and advancing demands over time.

This fragility is further reinforced by Eakle's (2019) "strong but fragile" thesis, which suggests that digital movements can mobilize large numbers of participants rapidly and at considerable scale, yet often struggle to transform such tactical capacity into sustained strategic capacity over the longer term. This pattern is consistent with the mechanism of complex contagion described by González-Bailón

et al. (2011), whereby participation is reinforced through repeated exposure within overlapping social networks. Individuals' decisions to participate in collective action are strongly influenced by repeated exposure to others within their social networks, allowing hashtag-based mobilization to achieve exponential growth without relying on formalized recruitment mechanisms.

The 17+8 Movement in Indonesia exhibits characteristics closely associated with the crowd-enabled network model. Its narratives circulated extensively across multiple social media platforms without centralized coordination or dominant formal leadership. The movement's identity was constructed through hashtags, political memes, short-form videos, and narratives reflecting citizens' everyday experiences of economic pressure and dissatisfaction with political elites (Sholikin et al., 2026). This mechanism facilitated the expansion of participation across social classes, as individual social media users could adapt, modify, and recirculate messages according to their own experiences and interpretations.

The 17+8 Movement constitutes a notable case because it successfully consolidated a set of collectively agreed demands in late August 2025, comprising

17 demands subject to short-term deadlines and eight demands expected to be addressed within one year. Several structural characteristics indicate its correspondence with the crowd-enabled network type within Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) framework. First, the movement lacked formal centralized leadership: its demands were not formulated by a single initiating organization but emerged from diverse demands articulated by civil society organizations, labor unions, and online petitions, which were subsequently consolidated through collaborative processes in digital spaces. Second, personal action frames were predominant. Rather than mobilizing around a single, uniform collective identity, individuals—including students, workers, and public figures—articulated demands through their own narratives while remaining connected through the shared digital symbol of the #17+8 hashtag. Third, technology functioned as the primary organizing agent. X, Instagram, and TikTok served as open channels for framing narratives and livestreaming developments on the ground, while previous studies have documented the use of closed communication platforms such as Telegram and Discord as coordination

spaces intended to reduce exposure to state surveillance (Putra et al., 2025).

This configuration generated an extraordinary pace of escalation. Within fewer than ten days of 25 August 2025, interactions associated with the #17+8 hashtag increased exponentially, reaching hundreds of thousands of interactions across platforms. This pattern is consistent with the mechanism of complex contagion described by González-Bailón et al. (2011), whereby participation is reinforced through repeated exposure across overlapping social networks. The escalation subsequently extended from online expressions of public opinion to simultaneous physical mobilization in twelve major cities in early September 2025 (Putra et al., 2025). The following timeline summarizes the critical stages of this escalation.

Figure 1. Timeline illustrating the escalation of the 17+8 Movement



Source: Putra dkk., (2025); CNN Indonesia, (2025); Liputan6, (2025); detikNews, (2025)

The figure illustrates the escalation of the 17+8 Movement, tracing its trajectory from the initial construction of narratives in digital spaces to the emergence of political demands directed toward the House of Representatives and the government. Between 20 and 25 August 2025, narratives concerning disparities in the institutional privileges of political elites and the economic pressures experienced by citizens gained increasing visibility through social media amplification. Between 26 and 28 August 2025, this momentum intensified through posts and calls opposing the proposed legislation, subsequently accompanied by street demonstrations.

The escalation reached its peak between 29 and 31 August, as demonstrations in physical spaces were accompanied by expanding digital solidarity and increasingly structured articulations of political demands. The 17+8 People's Demands emerged as a crystallization of collective aspirations, comprising 17 short-term demands and eight long-term demands. Between 1 and 5 September, a central paradox became evident: social media successfully transformed dispersed grievances into viral collective demands, yet their

capacity to generate formal policy change remained relatively limited. For instance, the response of the House of Representatives on 4 September included the suspension of housing allowances and several transparency measures; however, these measures did not automatically translate the broader structural demands into substantive policy changes.

The findings indicate that the 17+8 Movement developed through mechanisms of connective action rather than through hierarchical coordination by established social or political organizations. The demands circulated simultaneously across Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube through user-generated content, hashtags, infographics, short-form videos, and narratives of personal experience. This pattern indicates that the movement's identity was constructed through the personalization of political issues, such that participation did not depend on formal organizational membership but rather on shared perceptions of dissatisfaction with prevailing sociopolitical conditions.

Table 1. Sentiment Classification

Sentiment Category	Frequenc y	Presentage

Negative	699	87,59
Positive	70	8,77
Neutral	29	3,63

Source: Adapted from Sukarame (2025)

These data indicate that public discourse was predominantly characterized by negative sentiment concerning government policy, economic inequality, and declining public trust in state institutions. The sentiment dynamics on X further demonstrate the intensity of public attention surrounding the movement. Sukarame et al. (2025), based on an analysis of 789 posts published between 25 August and 5 September 2025, found that 87.59% of the discourse expressed negative sentiment toward the sociopolitical conditions underlying the movement's demands. The persistence of negative sentiment in the steady-state simulation further suggests a sustained pattern of public dissatisfaction throughout the observation period.

2. Platform Logic as Both Accelerator and Suppressor of Issue Visibility

Whereas Bennett and Segerberg explain the social structure of connective action, understanding why public attention to an issue declines over time

requires an additional framework addressing how digital platforms themselves operate. van Dijck et al. (2018) introduced the concept of the platform society to explain how digital platforms have become deeply embedded in social life, functioning not merely as neutral communication channels but as infrastructures that reorganize civic practices and democratic processes through algorithmic mechanisms, data models, and platform-designed interfaces. Poell et al. (2019) further developed this perspective through the concept of platformization, referring to the penetration of digital platforms' infrastructures, economic processes, and governance frameworks into diverse sectors of social life, including politics and social movements.

In this analysis, "platform logic" refers to the set of algorithmic rules that shape which content receives visibility, for how long, and among which audiences. Through the concept of the algorithmic imaginary, Bucher (2017) explains that social media users develop intuitive, though often inaccurate, understandings of how algorithms operate, and that these understandings subsequently shape how they produce and consume content. A central feature of platform logic is its orientation toward

novelty and immediate engagement: platform algorithms are fundamentally designed to maximize user retention by continuously presenting newer and more salient content rather than sustaining the visibility of a particular issue over an extended period.

The consequences of this logic are addressed directly by Eakle (2019) through the concept of the attention economy in the context of social movements. Eakle demonstrates that public attention, like other resources within social movements, is finite and competitively distributed. As the contemporary media ecology enables virtually anyone to produce and circulate content, social movements must continually compete with one another—and with entertainment, scandals, and other attention-demanding issues—to remain visible. Within such an ecology, an issue does not necessarily disappear because it has been resolved; rather, it may lose visibility because it is displaced in the competition for attention by subsequent issues that are newer and more salient to platform dynamics.

This mechanism intersects with what Dean (2005) conceptualizes as communicative capitalism, a condition in which the massive circulation of political messages may generate a depoliticizing

effect because the value of political contributions is measured primarily through their circulation—such as the number of shares, comments, and interactions—rather than through substantive responses from the authorities to whom those demands are directed. From Dean's perspective, the greater the volume of digitally expressed demands, the greater the potential illusion that those demands have been "heard," even though message circulation does not automatically translate into binding political decisions.

The core of the paradoxical argument developed here lies in the observation that the same digital mechanisms that accelerate mass mobilization can subsequently contribute to the erosion of its visibility. During the escalation phase from 25 to 31 August 2025, platform affordances appeared to favor the movement as content depicting alleged state violence, the death of Affan Kurniawan, and narratives of public solidarity generated high levels of engagement. The combination of moral outrage, event novelty, and participation by public figures made such content highly compatible with algorithmic dynamics that prioritize intensive interaction and strong emotional signals (Bucher, 2017).

During this phase, platform logic functioned as an accelerator: each new post increased the visibility of the #17+8 hashtag, which in turn stimulated patterns consistent with complex contagion (González-Bailón et al., 2011) and facilitated the transition from online expression to physical mobilization. Digital activism and physical protest thereby constituted a form of hybrid activism in which connective and collective action unfolded simultaneously (Showden et al., 2025).



Figure 2. Digital Amplification as an Initial Trigger of the 17+8 Movement

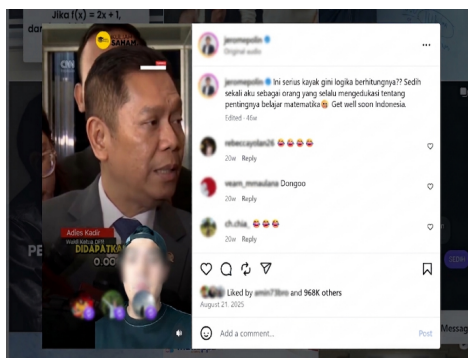


Figure 3. The Transformation of Digital Mobilization into Collective Demands:
 The 17+8 Movement

Figure 2 illustrates a critical stage in the formation of the 17+8 Movement through the logic of social media. Initial narratives concerning political elites' responses to public grievances were subsequently reproduced and digitally amplified through reposts, comments, and extensive user engagement. This process demonstrates that platforms function not merely as channels for information dissemination, but also as mechanisms for shaping public attention and fostering collective solidarity.

Figure 3 illustrates the crystallization of demands, whereby various grievances previously dispersed across digital spaces were consolidated into the 17+8 People's Demands and subsequently brought into the formal political arena. This development is consistent with reports indicating that the demands represented a synthesis of diverse claims circulating across social media and were subsequently disseminated simultaneously across digital networks. The strength of digital movements does not necessarily derive from large, dense, and decentralized networks alone, but also from their capacity to sustain connectivity,

narratives, and collective memory in the face of disruption (Utami, 2026).

However, following the symbolic submission of the 17+8 demands on 4 September 2025, the same algorithmic dynamics began to work against the movement. A defining characteristic of platform algorithms is novelty bias, whereby recommendation systems continuously prioritize content that is newer and more closely aligned with current patterns of engagement rather than sustaining the long-term visibility of a particular issue (Poell et al., 2019). Once the peak events had passed, the supply of sufficiently emotional and highly engaging content capable of maintaining the #17+8 hashtag at the top of trending rankings gradually diminished. Meanwhile, new issues, both related and unrelated to the 17+8 Movement, continued to emerge and compete for the same pool of algorithmically mediated attention. Eakle (2019) conceptualizes this structural competition as a defining feature of the attention economy in contemporary social movements, in which public attention constitutes a scarce resource that must be continuously reclaimed rather than a form of capital that, once acquired, can be expected to endure.

Cross-class solidarity also emerged during this period, indicating that dissatisfaction with prevailing political and economic conditions extended beyond lower- and middle-income groups alone (Putra et al., 2025). The personal action frame structure underlying this escalation can be understood schematically: individual citizens, public figures, and civil society groups contributed distinct layers of narrative while remaining connected through shared digital symbols. These actors did not merely articulate political demands; they also had to produce narratives capable of attracting attention, facilitating sharing, and generating engagement in order to remain visible within the platform's information flows (Nieborg & Poell, 2018).

The circulation of these narratives relied on simple visual formats and easily reproducible slogans, accelerating information diffusion across platforms while expanding the reach of public participation. However, platform logic also generated a highly compressed attention cycle. The 17+8 Movement demonstrates that, following a surge in virality from late August to early September 2025, the intensity of digital discourse declined sharply amid information fatigue, opinion polarization,

and growing frustration with the government's delayed response. Consequently, the lifespan of digital attention was substantially shorter than the policy-making processes required to address the demands articulated by the public.

Table 2. Secondary Evidence of Public Participation and Sentiment Dynamics in the “17+8 Movement, August 28 – September 21, 2025

Date	Coversat ion Volume	Domina nt Themes	Public Sentime nt
30/8 /25	1.200	Reset Indonesi a	Positive, Enthusia stic
4/9/ 25	3.508	Viral demands	Predomi nantly positive
5/9/ 25– 9/9/ 25	4.000+	Criticism of graphics, narrative s, and polarizati on	Mixed, beginnin g to polarize
21/9 /25	15	Fading issues,	Negative, skeptical

skepticis
m

Source: Adapted from Balqis Sulistiyani and Yayuk Lestari (2026)

Table 2 demonstrates that sentiment surrounding the 17+8 Movement began to intensify on 30 August 2025 and reached its peak on 5 September. Participation declined on 21 September 2025 (post escalation attention decline) , influenced by the characteristics of social media that privilege simplified narratives, low-risk forms of action, and relevance to dominant metanarratives. When the dominant narrative begins to be questioned or new issues emerge, public attention can shift rapidly, thereby accelerating the decline in issue visibility. This suggests that although social media is effective in generating initial awareness, platforms are not necessarily effective in producing structural or policy change without strategies that integrate online and offline action, supported by sustained and adaptive narratives and consistent engagement by key actors.

Digital repression further accelerated this process of declining visibility. Since early September 2025, security forces responded to escalating

mobilization through forced dispersals, the arrest of citizen journalists, the blocking of livestreaming features on several platforms, and restrictions on internet access at certain protest sites (Putra et al., 2025). This pattern is consistent with the concept of digital repression described by Feldstein (2021), as well as King and Roberts' (2013) study of how states may tolerate the continued expression of individual criticism while systematically suppressing collective expressions that could potentially be coordinated into broader forms of collective pressure. When repression reduces the visibility of content produced by core accounts driving the discourse at the same time that the supply of fresh content declines as a result of algorithmic novelty bias, these two mechanisms can reinforce one another, accelerating the disappearance of public attention to the movement's demands.

This is where the central paradox lies: the personal action frame that constitutes a major source of strength during the mobilization phase, by allowing anyone to contribute through their own narrative without waiting for organizational direction, is simultaneously the structure that leaves the movement without an institutional

"firekeeper" capable of deliberately and coordinately sustaining public attention once its organic viral momentum subsides. Formal organizations, despite being slower and more rigid in responding to sudden events, possess a structural advantage at precisely this point: they can deliberately and continuously generate political pressure through public hearings, legal demands, and regular press conferences without depending on whether platform algorithms are currently "favoring" a particular issue. A crowd-enabled network such as the 17+8 Movement lacks an equivalent capacity; consequently, once platform logic shifts public attention elsewhere, no substitute mechanism is readily available to deliberately reproduce that visibility.

This phenomenon demonstrates that platform algorithms are effective at optimizing the distribution of attention but are not designed to sustain long-term political pressure. From the perspective of van Dijck and Poell, platforms operate according to the principles of popularity, connectivity, programmability, and datafication. Consequently, political issues must continually compete with entertainment content and emerging issues that attract algorithmically mediated attention. As levels of

engagement decline, content distribution also decreases, causing the digital public sphere to lose momentum even when the substantive demands themselves have not yet been adequately addressed through policy responses. Thus, the 17+8 Movement's success in generating virality reveals a fundamental paradox: social media algorithms are more effective at producing bursts of public attention than at sustaining the continuity of social movements.

3. The Paradox of Digital Democracy in the 17+8 Movement

Situating the paradox of “demands” within the broader theoretical debate on democracy, this analysis draws on several perspectives concerning the contradictory character of contemporary democracy. Mouffe (2000) argues that modern liberal democracy is constituted by a structural tension between two traditions that are not fully compatible: the liberal tradition, which upholds universal equality and individual rights, and the democratic tradition, which requires a distinction between “us” and “them” as a prerequisite for popular sovereignty. According to Mouffe, this tension can never be fully resolved but must instead be continuously renegotiated.

Contemporary digital spaces constitute a new arena for such negotiation, in which citizens' expressions of political antagonism can expand on a massive scale while the institutions responsible for accommodating them remain relatively closed.

(Crouch, 2004) uses the term post-democracy to describe a condition in which formal democratic institutions—including elections, parliaments, and public spaces for protest—are retained and may even appear increasingly vibrant, while the substance of political decision-making gradually shifts toward more closed elite circles. From this perspective, mass collective movements can be understood as one of the most visible manifestations of participation within a post-democratic space: citizen participation may expand dramatically in digital environments, while substantive decisions remain concentrated among a limited group of legislative and executive elites who retain considerable discretion over which demands to accommodate and which to leave unresolved.

(Keane, 2009) complements this framework with the concept of monitory democracy, a phase of democracy in which power is monitored not solely through periodic elections but also through dispersed and continuous

networks of oversight, including social media, citizen journalism, and independent monitoring organizations. The emergence of independent monitoring platforms such as *bijakmemantau.id* following the movement provides an illustration of monitory democracy in practice. Where the movement itself lacks a formal organizational structure capable of overseeing the implementation of its demands, this monitoring function may instead be assumed by independent entities emerging from civic initiatives. Nevertheless, as demonstrated by the trajectory of mass collective mobilization, such monitoring capacity does not automatically possess the coercive or institutional leverage necessary to alter elite decision-making. It can document the gap between political commitments and their implementation, but lacks the institutional mechanisms required to close that gap.

It is at the intersection of these three frameworks that this analysis formulates its central proposition: the paradox of digital democracy is not an isolated failure, but a structural consequence of the way connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) operates within an ecosystem governed

by platform logic (Poell et al., 2019), in a democratic context that is itself inherently paradoxical (Mouffe, 2000; Crouch, 2004). The very forces that enable citizens to rapidly consolidate and formulate coherent demands—digital personalization and virality—can, once absorbed into algorithmically mediated attention cycles, become structural constraints on sustaining their implementation.

The gap between the accessibility of digital mobilization and its limited conversion into concrete policy constitutes the central problem examined in this analysis. Rather than treating this discrepancy simply as a failure of movement effectiveness, this study argues that the movement's achievements and limitations represent two dimensions of the same paradox. The capacity to rapidly unite citizens across social classes, often celebrated as an expression of mature digital civic participation, rests precisely on a platform-based organizational architecture that remains vulnerable to cyclical attention dynamics. Consequently, the digital mechanisms that initially crystallize the movement may also contribute to the erosion of issue continuity as new information

trends accumulate and displace existing demands.

By the deadline for the seventeen urgent demands on 5 September 2025, Rimadi (2025) reported that no significant follow-up had yet been achieved. Maharani (2025), meanwhile, reported that following the expiration of the deadline, the government and the House of Representatives had responded to only some of the demands, while structurally oriented demands remained unrealized. With the eight long-term reform agendas scheduled to reach their deadline on 31 August 2026, records from Bijakmemantau.id (2026) indicate that, by mid-2026, only parliamentary reform, tax reform, and deliberations on the Asset Forfeiture Bill had entered the “in process” stage, whereas most other items—including revisions to the Police Law and the TNI Law, strengthening of the National Human Rights Commission, and reviews of economic and labor policies—remained classified as “not yet addressed.” This pattern indicates a systematic implementation gap: demands affecting the structural interests of security institutions and political elites tend to stagnate, whereas those that have been accommodated generally take the form of symbolic concessions carrying relatively low

political costs for the government and the House of Representatives. This pattern is consistent with (Crouch, 2004) post-democracy thesis, in which formal mechanisms of participation are maintained while substantive decision-making remains concentrated within elite circles.

As a domestic comparison, Muliono’s (2026) findings on the 2025 mass protests in Pati Regency reveal a similar pattern at the local level. Rapid digital mobilization, driven by intense collective outrage, succeeded in compelling the removal of a local official within days; however, this outcome was facilitated by the highly specific and singular nature of the demand—the removal of one official—rather than a set of twenty-five structural demands such as those articulated by the 17+8 Movement. This comparison reinforces the argument that the broader and more complex the agenda of a crowd-enabled network becomes, the more vulnerable it is to fragmentation of algorithmically mediated attention, because each individual demand must effectively compete for the same limited pool of visibility as the others rather than mutually reinforcing one another.

In the context of the 17+8 Movement, social media algorithms

successfully accelerated information diffusion and enhanced the visibility of issues within the digital public sphere. However, the highly fluid nature of the network, decentralized leadership, and limited organizational structure made it difficult to consolidate public demands into a policy agenda supported by identifiable representative actors within the formal political arena. Thus, greater intensity of digital connectivity does not necessarily correspond to greater effectiveness in policy advocacy.

Building on this argument, the study adopts the Logic of Connective Action as its primary theoretical framework for explaining how digital platform logic shapes the mobilization patterns of the 17+8 Movement. It further extends this framework by incorporating the dimension of policy conversion. The analysis therefore moves beyond the success of digital mobilization to examine why substantial mobilizational capacity may nonetheless encounter constraints when entering the institutional arena of the state. In doing so, the article seeks to extend Bennett and Segerberg's theoretical contribution by explaining the paradox of digital democracy in developing countries: a condition in which public connectivity

increases dramatically while the capacity to influence policy remains limited.

By integrating the three theoretical layers employed in this study, the analysis formulates the digital-democracy paradox of the 17+8 Movement through three interrelated propositions. First, the structural proposition holds that crowd-enabled connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) facilitates the rapid and inclusive crystallization of demands precisely because it is not brokered by formal organizations; however, the same structure leaves the movement without durable mechanisms for negotiating and monitoring demands beyond the viral cycle. Second, the mechanistic proposition posits that platform logic (Poell et al., 2019), while initially accelerating the diffusion of grievances through engagement bias and strong emotional signals, subsequently accelerates the decline in issue visibility through novelty bias and competition for attention (Eakle, 2019). The same logic therefore functions simultaneously as an accelerator and a suppressor of issue visibility. Third, the broader structural-political proposition suggests that the gap between explosive digital participation and substantive decisions that remain concentrated in the hands of

political elites represents a broader feature of contemporary democracy, as theorized by Mouffe (2000), Crouch (2004), and Dean (2005). The 17+8 case is therefore not merely an Indonesian anomaly but a localized manifestation of a broader tendency within digital democracy to transform political antagonism into intense message circulation that can nevertheless be structurally absorbed without necessarily producing substantive changes in decision-making.

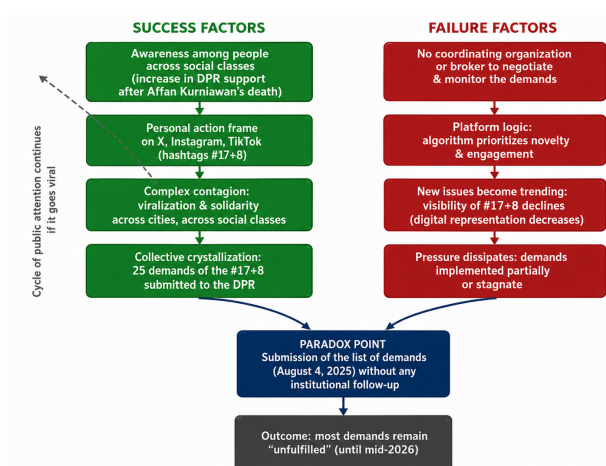
The principal findings reveal a substantial gap between the scale of digital mobilization and the limited conversion of public demands into public policy. Although the 17+8 Movement attracted extensive attention across social media, most of its demands were not immediately translated into substantive policy changes. This phenomenon indicates an institutional mismatch between the logic of digital platforms and the institutional logic of democratic governance. Social media operates through the rapid distribution of attention, whereas representative democracy requires considerably slower processes of legislation, political negotiation, interinstitutional consultation, and coalition building.

In South Korea, Putra et al. (2025) describe how the 2024 protests against martial law were rapidly converted into formal political change because the digital ecosystem was directly connected to established institutional channels, including parliamentary proceedings and constitutional impeachment mechanisms. Online pressure could therefore be translated into legislative decisions within hours, before platform logic had sufficient time to redirect public attention toward other issues. By contrast, in Indonesia, a pluralistic digital sphere accelerated mobilization by resonance without being matched by equally robust institutional channels. Consequently, the temporal gap between the peak of mobilization and substantive political decisions was sufficiently long for platform logic to redirect public attention before such decisions could be enacted.

The limitations of the 17+8 Movement should not be interpreted as evidence that digital activism is irrelevant to Indonesian democracy, nor as a personal failure on the part of its organizers. Social movements cannot be explained solely in terms of organizational capacity or protest strategies; their outcomes are also shaped by the political context, public

opinion, political allies, state structures, and interactions between movements and external actors (Giugni, 1998). As the analysis demonstrates, the movement nevertheless succeeded in reopening public discourse on security-sector reform, freedom of expression, and state accountability in the digital-democratic era. This represents a meaningful discursive achievement, even though it has not yet been translated into binding policy outcomes. The limitation is therefore more appropriately understood as a structural conversion failure: the capacity of connective action to mobilize public attention and solidarity operates alongside, rather than in direct proportion to, its vulnerability to platform logic, which ultimately determines how long public attention can be sustained before being displaced by the next viral issue.

Figure 4. The Structural Paradox of Connective Action and Policy Conversion in the 17+8 Movement



The paradox of digital democracy in the 17+8 Movement refers to a condition in which the very factors that facilitate successful mobilization simultaneously become sources of limitation in achieving sustained political change. On the one hand, personal action frames emerged through social media platforms, particularly X, Instagram, and TikTok, under the hashtag #17+8. Interactions among users generated complex contagion, expanding solidarity across geographic and class boundaries and ultimately crystallizing into 25 points of demands, comprising 17 urgent demands and eight reform agendas. On the other hand, this highly platform-dependent mobilization was not accompanied by the presence of a broker organization capable of conducting political negotiations, coordinating follow-up actions, and overseeing the implementation of the demands. As platform algorithms redirected public attention toward emerging issues, the movement's visibility declined, thereby weakening political pressure on the government. Consequently, the submission of the demands remained largely symbolic rather than institutional. The success of digital mobilization, therefore, did not automatically generate

the capacity to sustain political pressure or ensure policy implementation.

From the perspective of paradoxical democracy, this condition demonstrates that increased digital participation does not necessarily translate into stronger democratic quality. Democracy encounters a paradox when citizens are granted extensive spaces for political expression while their influence over substantive decision-making remains limited. Digital movements may democratize communication without necessarily democratizing policymaking. The intensity of digital advocacy does not correspond proportionally to policy change because movements lack formal representative mechanisms capable of transmitting demands into institutional political processes. High levels of digital participation are not necessarily accompanied by adequate organizational structures, leadership, or negotiation strategies. Thus, the central paradox of the 17+8 Movement lies not in the weakness of public participation, but in the misalignment between platform logic and the institutional logic of democracy. The greater the capacity of social media to accelerate the circulation of information, the more apparent become the limitations of formal democratic

mechanisms in accommodating public pressures that are rapid, fluid, and weakly institutionalized.

Based on this analysis, this article proposes the conceptual model of the Policy Conversion Gap, referring to a condition in which mobilization successfully increases issue visibility and public participation but fails to generate substantive policy change due to the absence of mechanisms connecting the digital public sphere with formal policymaking processes. This concept extends the Logic of Connective Action by moving beyond its conventional emphasis on the mobilizational capacity of digitally networked action to explain why successful digital mobilization may remain at the level of public attention and discursive resonance without progressing toward institutional transformation.

Conclusion

The analysis of the 17+8 Movement demonstrates that the gap between the intensity of digital mobilization and its limited conversion into concrete policy outcomes is not an isolated failure, but rather a structural consequence of three interrelated mechanisms. First, connective action enables demands to crystallize rapidly and inclusively precisely because they are

not brokered by formal organizations; however, the same structure lacks durable mechanisms for negotiating, coordinating, and monitoring demands beyond the viral cycle, thereby constraining policy conversion. Second, platform logic, which functions as an accelerator during the escalation phase through engagement bias and strong emotional signals, becomes a mechanism for suppressing issue visibility in the post-deadline phase through novelty bias and the platform's attention economy, a process further intensified by digital repression that constrains the visibility of accounts driving the discourse. Third, this gap reinforces the paradoxical character of contemporary democracy: citizen participation may expand dramatically within digital spaces while substantive decision-making remains concentrated within political elite circles. This pattern reflects the condition of post-democracy, positioning the Indonesian case as a localized manifestation of a broader global tendency rather than an isolated anomaly.

The theoretical implications of these findings point to the need to extend the connective action framework by explicitly incorporating institutional channels as a determinant of successful

policy conversion, rather than focusing solely on the scale and speed of mobilization. Practically, the findings suggest that future digital social movements in Indonesia should consider establishing more permanent post-mobilization monitoring and advocacy structures so that sustained public pressure does not depend entirely on inherently temporary cycles of algorithmically mediated attention. Future research could further develop this analysis by incorporating quantitative data on actual patterns of hashtag visibility decline, as well as more systematic cross-national comparative studies examining the relationship between the organizational structure of connective movements and the institutional capacity of their political recipients.

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