



Youth for the Earth: The Role of Young Activists in Indonesia's Climate Justice Movement

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Abstract

This paper explores the pivotal role of youth in Indonesia's climate justice movement, highlighting how young activists are driving transformative change in the fight against climate change. As one of the most climate-vulnerable nations in the world, Indonesia is witnessing a surge in youth-led climate activism, with young people increasingly taking a stand to address environmental degradation and social inequality. This study examines the ways in which young activists are challenging both environmental injustice and the inequitable impacts of climate change, particularly in marginalized communities. Drawing on case studies, interviews with youth leaders, and an analysis of youth-driven campaigns, the research highlights how young people are reshaping the climate justice discourse by advocating for policies that integrate environmental sustainability with social equity. The paper finds that youth movements in Indonesia are not only raising awareness about climate change but are also mobilizing grassroots actions, organizing protests, and influencing policy debates at local, national, and international levels. However, challenges such as limited access to decision-making processes, political resistance, and a lack of institutional support remain barriers to their full participation. The research argues that the youth-led climate justice movement is essential in shaping a more equitable and sustainable future, emphasizing the need for greater support for youth inclusion in climate policymaking. This study contributes to the broader conversation on climate justice by illustrating how young activists are central to advancing climate solutions that prioritize both ecological and social justice.

[Tulisan ini mengeksplorasi peran penting kaum muda dalam gerakan keadilan iklim di Indonesia, menyoroti bagaimana aktivis muda mendorong perubahan transformatif dalam perjuangan melawan perubahan iklim. Sebagai salah satu negara yang paling rentan terhadap



perubahan iklim di dunia, Indonesia menyaksikan lonjakan aktivisme iklim yang dipimpin kaum muda, dengan kaum muda semakin mengambil sikap untuk mengatasi degradasi lingkungan dan ketidaksetaraan sosial. Studi ini meneliti cara-cara di mana aktivis muda menantang ketidakadilan lingkungan dan dampak perubahan iklim yang tidak merata, khususnya di komunitas yang terpinggirkan. Dengan menggunakan studi kasus, wawancara dengan pemimpin muda, dan analisis kampanye yang digerakkan oleh kaum muda, penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana kaum muda membentuk kembali wacana keadilan iklim dengan mengadvokasi kebijakan yang mengintegrasikan keberlanjutan lingkungan dengan kesetaraan sosial. Makalah ini menemukan bahwa gerakan kaum muda di Indonesia tidak hanya meningkatkan kesadaran tentang perubahan iklim tetapi juga memobilisasi aksi akar rumput, mengorganisir protes, dan memengaruhi debat kebijakan di tingkat lokal, nasional, dan internasional. Namun, tantangan seperti akses terbatas ke proses pengambilan keputusan, resistensi politik, dan kurangnya dukungan kelembagaan tetap menjadi hambatan bagi partisipasi penuh mereka. Penelitian ini berpendapat bahwa gerakan keadilan iklim yang dipimpin kaum muda sangat penting dalam membentuk masa depan yang lebih adil dan berkelanjutan, menekankan perlunya dukungan yang lebih besar untuk inklusi kaum muda dalam pembuatan kebijakan iklim. Studi ini berkontribusi pada percakapan yang lebih luas tentang keadilan iklim dengan menggambarkan bagaimana aktivis muda berperan sentral dalam memajukan solusi iklim yang memprioritaskan keadilan ekologis dan sosial.]

Keywords: Youth Activism, Climate Justice, Climate Change, Social Equity, Environmental Advocacy

Introduction

The accelerating intensification of climate change has positioned Indonesia among the most climate-vulnerable nations globally, with escalating risks arising from sea-level rise, extreme weather events, biodiversity loss, and socio-ecological degradation disproportionately affecting marginalized coastal, rural, and indigenous communities (IPCC, 2023; Yusuf & Francisco, 2021). These impacts are not merely environmental in nature but are deeply embedded within historical patterns of extractivism, uneven development, and socio-economic inequality, thereby rendering climate change an inherently political and justice-oriented issue (Schlosberg, 2019; Sultana, 2022). Within this context, the discourse of climate justice has gained increasing prominence as a normative and analytical framework that foregrounds questions of equity, responsibility, and power across spatial, social, and generational dimensions (Newell et al., 2021).

Parallel to the intensification of climate impacts, recent decades have witnessed the emergence of youth as central political actors in climate governance at both global and national scales. Youth-led mobilizations—exemplified by

transnational movements such as *Fridays for Future* and *Extinction Rebellion Youth*—have challenged conventional political hierarchies by asserting moral authority, intergenerational claims, and alternative visions of sustainability (de Moor et al., 2020; Pickard et al., 2023). In Indonesia, this global momentum has converged with local environmental struggles, giving rise to a growing constellation of youth-led initiatives, grassroots organizations, and digital advocacy networks that articulate climate change as a matter of justice, rights, and democratic inclusion rather than technocratic environmental management alone (Risaldi & Ramadani, 2024; Savirani & Aspinall, 2022).

Climate justice scholarship increasingly recognizes youth activism as a transformative force capable of reshaping dominant climate narratives and governance paradigms (O'Brien et al., 2018; Bowman, 2023). Youth engagement in climate action is grounded not only in scientific awareness but also in ethical claims rooted in intergenerational justice, future rights, and moral responsibility, positioning young people as both stakeholders and agents of systemic change (Gardiner, 2017; Han & Ahn, 2020). Through protest, storytelling, digital mobilization, and community-based initiatives, youth activists challenge the political inertia of states and corporations while simultaneously constructing alternative imaginaries of socio-ecological futures (Fisher, 2019; Taft & Gordon, 2020).

In the Global South, youth climate activism often intersects with broader struggles over development, land rights, labor precarity, and social exclusion, thereby expanding the scope of climate justice beyond emissions reduction toward questions of distributive, procedural, and recognition justice (Sovacool et al., 2020; Temper et al., 2023). Indonesian youth activists, in particular, have articulated climate justice through localized frames that link environmental degradation to extractive industries, urban inequality, and rural dispossession, demonstrating how global climate discourses are reinterpreted through national and subnational socio-political contexts (Afiff & Rachman, 2019; Mulyani et al., 2022).

Indonesia's climate governance landscape is characterized by a paradoxical coexistence of ambitious international commitments and persistent domestic governance constraints. While the state has formally committed to emissions reduction targets and climate adaptation strategies, implementation remains uneven due to institutional fragmentation, economic dependence on natural resource extraction, and limited public participation in environmental decision-making (Di Gregorio et al., 2019; Resosudarmo et al., 2020). Within this governance architecture, youth remain structurally marginalized, with limited representation in formal policy processes and climate institutions, despite being among those most affected by long-term climate risks (UNDP, 2022).

Nevertheless, Indonesian youth have increasingly utilized digital platforms, social media, and translocal networks to circumvent institutional barriers,

enabling new forms of political participation and agenda-setting (Lim, 2022; Nugroho & Syarief, 2023). Digital activism has allowed young climate advocates to disseminate counter-narratives, mobilize collective action, and pressure policymakers, while also fostering horizontal solidarities across regions and movements. These practices illustrate how youth activism operates simultaneously within and beyond formal governance spaces, reshaping the contours of climate politics in Indonesia.

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to critically examine the role of young activists within Indonesia's climate justice movement by addressing three interrelated research questions. First, what substantive and symbolic roles do youth activists play in advancing climate justice agendas at local, national, and transnational levels? Second, how do youth-led initiatives influence climate policy debates, public discourse, and societal perceptions of climate responsibility and equity? Third, what structural challenges and political opportunities shape youth participation in climate justice advocacy within Indonesia's socio-environmental governance framework?

By engaging with these questions, this research contributes to the growing interdisciplinary literature on youth activism, climate justice, and environmental governance in the Global South. It advances scholarly understanding of how youth activism not only responds to climate change but actively reconfigures power relations, discursive frameworks, and pathways toward more just and inclusive climate futures.

Literature Review

A. Youth Activism and Social Movements

Scholarly examinations of youth activism have long emphasized the distinctive positionality of young people within social movements, highlighting their capacity to act as both political challengers and cultural innovators. Classical theories of collective action, including resource mobilization theory and political process theory, initially framed youth participation as contingent upon access to organizational resources, political opportunities, and elite alliances (McAdam, 1982; Tarrow, 2011). However, more recent scholarship has critiqued these approaches for underestimating the normative, affective, and identity-based dimensions of youth mobilization, particularly in contexts where formal political access is constrained (Taft, 2017; Pickard, 2019).

Contemporary perspectives increasingly conceptualize youth activism as a form of contentious politics that blends institutional engagement with disruptive practices, symbolic performances, and digital mobilization (della Porta, 2020; Earl et al., 2022). In environmental and climate justice contexts, youth-led movements have been shown to transcend traditional protest repertoires by integrating scientific discourse, moral claims, and intergenerational narratives that challenge dominant political imaginaries (Fisher, 2019; Bowman, 2023).

These movements often operate through decentralized networks rather than hierarchical organizations, enabling flexibility, rapid diffusion, and transnational connectivity while simultaneously embedding activism within local socio-ecological struggles (de Moor et al., 2020; Han & Ahn, 2020).

In the Global South, youth activism is further shaped by structural inequalities, developmental pressures, and postcolonial legacies, resulting in movement trajectories that differ markedly from those in the Global North (Nilsen & Roy, 2019). Studies suggest that youth activists in these contexts frequently articulate environmental concerns alongside demands for social justice, employment security, and democratic inclusion, thereby situating climate action within broader struggles over citizenship and rights (Sovacool et al., 2020; Temper et al., 2023).

B. Climate Justice and Social Equity

The concept of climate justice has emerged as a critical framework for understanding climate change as a multidimensional social problem rather than a purely environmental or technical challenge. Building on environmental justice scholarship, climate justice emphasizes three interrelated dimensions: distributive justice (the unequal distribution of climate impacts and benefits), procedural justice (inequities in decision-making processes), and recognitional justice (the marginalization of certain identities, knowledges, and experiences) (Schlosberg, 2019; Newell et al., 2021). More recently, scholars have foregrounded intergenerational justice, highlighting the ethical implications of present-day decisions for future generations who will disproportionately bear the long-term consequences of climate change (Gardiner, 2017; Sultana, 2022).

Within this framework, youth are increasingly recognized as key stakeholders whose lives, livelihoods, and rights are directly implicated in climate trajectories. Research demonstrates that young people frequently invoke moral and temporal arguments—such as the right to a livable future—to legitimize their political claims and contest the short-termism of state and corporate actors (O’Brien et al., 2018; Han & Ahn, 2020). Youth activism thus plays a dual role in climate justice discourse: it exposes structural injustices embedded in existing socio-economic systems while also advancing alternative visions of sustainable and equitable development (Bowman, 2023; Pickard et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, critical scholars caution that climate justice narratives risk becoming depoliticized when institutional actors selectively incorporate youth voices without addressing underlying power asymmetries or redistributive demands (Kenis & Mathijs, 2014; Newell, 2022). This tension underscores the need to examine how youth climate justice claims are negotiated, constrained, or co-opted within existing governance frameworks.

C. Youth, Climate Policy, and Governance

At the level of climate policy and governance, youth participation has expanded notably over the past decade, particularly within international arenas such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), where youth constituencies have gained formal recognition through mechanisms such as YOUNGO (Wallace, 2021). Empirical studies suggest that youth engagement contributes to agenda-setting, norm diffusion, and public accountability, even when direct policy influence remains limited (Fisher & Nasrin, 2021; Kuokkanen et al., 2023).

At national and subnational levels, however, youth inclusion in climate governance remains uneven and often symbolic. Research across diverse political contexts reveals persistent barriers to meaningful participation, including age-based exclusion, technocratic policymaking cultures, limited access to resources, and the framing of youth as future rather than present political subjects (Taft & Gordon, 2020; UNDP, 2022). In many Global South countries, these challenges are compounded by weak institutional channels for civic engagement and the prioritization of economic growth over environmental protection (Di Gregorio et al., 2019; Resosudarmo et al., 2020).

Despite these constraints, youth activists increasingly engage in hybrid governance strategies that combine policy advocacy with grassroots organizing, legal action, and digital campaigning. Such strategies enable young people to exert influence beyond formal institutions, reshape public discourse, and pressure policymakers through reputational and normative mechanisms (Lim, 2022; Nugroho & Syarief, 2023). These findings suggest that youth participation in climate governance cannot be fully understood through institutional analysis alone but must be situated within broader sociopolitical and communicative ecosystems.

D. Research Gap

While the international literature on youth climate activism and climate justice has grown rapidly, significant empirical and conceptual gaps remain, particularly with regard to the Global South. In the Indonesian context, existing studies have largely focused on environmental governance, policy frameworks, or civil society organizations at the macro level, with limited attention to youth-led climate justice movements as distinct political actors (Savirani & Aspinall, 2022; Mulyani et al., 2022). Moreover, available research often treats youth as a homogeneous category, overlooking internal diversities related to class, gender, geography, and access to political resources.

Crucially, there remains insufficient engagement with youth perspectives, lived experiences, and grassroots strategies through which climate justice is articulated and enacted in everyday contexts. Few studies examine how young activists navigate structural constraints, build alliances, and deploy localized

justice frames to contest dominant development paradigms in Indonesia. Addressing these gaps is essential for advancing a more nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of youth climate activism and for informing more inclusive and equitable climate governance frameworks.

Methodology

A. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in interpretivist epistemology, which is particularly suited to examining the meanings, practices, and power relations embedded within youth-led climate justice activism. Qualitative approaches are widely recognized as effective for capturing the complexity of social movements, especially those characterized by fluid organizational structures, normative claims, and context-specific strategies (della Porta, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Drawing on social movement theory and climate justice scholarship, the research conceptualizes youth activism not merely as episodic protest but as an ongoing process of collective meaning-making, political negotiation, and socio-environmental contestation (Schlosberg, 2019; de Moor et al., 2020).

By foregrounding the perspectives and experiences of young activists, this design enables an in-depth exploration of how climate justice is articulated, practiced, and contested within Indonesia's socio-political and environmental context. The research is exploratory and explanatory in nature, seeking to illuminate the roles, strategies, and challenges of youth activists while situating these dynamics within broader structures of climate governance and inequality.

B. Data Collection

Data were collected through a multi-method qualitative strategy to enhance analytical depth and triangulation. First, the study employed case studies of youth-led climate justice initiatives and organizations operating at local and national levels in Indonesia. Case study research is particularly valuable for examining contemporary social phenomena within real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are blurred (Yin, 2018). The selected cases represent diverse forms of youth activism, including grassroots collectives, advocacy networks, and digitally mediated movements, allowing for variation in organizational form, scale, and strategic orientation.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with youth activists, organizers, and movement leaders involved in climate justice advocacy. Semi-structured interviews provide flexibility to explore participants' lived experiences, motivations, and interpretations while maintaining analytical coherence across interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Interview questions focused on participants' pathways into activism, understandings of climate justice, engagement with policy processes, and perceived barriers and

opportunities for youth participation. This approach foregrounds youth voices as epistemically significant, aligning with calls in climate justice research to center marginalized and underrepresented perspectives (Sultana, 2022).

Third, the study undertook a systematic analysis of youth-driven campaigns, policy submissions, public statements, social media content, and advocacy materials produced by the selected initiatives. These documents serve as critical artifacts through which movements articulate claims, frame injustices, and engage publics and policymakers. Documentary analysis enables the examination of discursive strategies and framing processes that may not be fully captured through interviews alone (Bowen, 2009; Benford & Snow, 2000).

C. Data Analysis

The analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, which is well suited to identifying patterns of meaning across qualitative datasets while allowing for theoretical flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Interview transcripts and documentary materials were coded iteratively, combining inductive coding derived from the data with deductive coding informed by key concepts in social movement and climate justice theory, such as intergenerational justice, political opportunity structures, and framing processes. This iterative process facilitated the refinement of themes and ensured analytical rigor through constant comparison across data sources.

In addition, a cross-case comparative analysis was conducted to examine similarities and differences in youth activism strategies across cases. Cross-case comparison enhances the explanatory power of qualitative research by identifying recurring mechanisms and context-specific variations in movement practices (George & Bennett, 2005). This analytical step enabled the study to assess how factors such as organizational form, political context, and access to resources shape youth engagement in climate justice advocacy, thereby moving beyond single-case insights toward more generalizable theoretical contributions.

D. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to all stages of the research, particularly given the involvement of young participants and the politically sensitive nature of environmental activism. All participants were provided with clear and accessible information about the research objectives, procedures, and potential risks, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Where necessary, pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities and to minimize potential risks related to political expression or activism (Orb et al., 2001).

The study also engaged in ongoing researcher reflexivity, acknowledging that knowledge production is shaped by the researcher's positionality, assumptions, and power relations with participants (Finlay, 2002). Reflexive

practices included critical self-examination of interpretive choices and attentiveness to how the researcher's background and institutional affiliation may influence interactions with youth activists and the representation of their narratives. Such reflexivity is particularly important in climate justice research, where ethical engagement and epistemic responsibility are integral to producing socially meaningful and respectful scholarship.

Analysis and Discussion

A. Forms of Youth Climate Justice Activism in Indonesia

The findings demonstrate that youth climate justice activism in Indonesia is characterized by a pluralized and context-sensitive repertoire of contention, reflecting both global influences and localized socio-environmental realities. Grassroots mobilization remains a foundational strategy, with youth-led protests, climate strikes, and public demonstrations—particularly in major urban centers such as Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, and Makassar—serving as visible interventions into public space. These actions often align symbolically with transnational movements like *Fridays for Future*, yet are discursively localized through demands addressing coal dependency, deforestation, and coastal degradation, illustrating what Tarrow (2011) conceptualizes as *rooted cosmopolitanism*.

Digital advocacy constitutes a second, highly salient mode of activism. Indonesian youth activists strategically utilize social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter/X, and TikTok to translate scientific knowledge into accessible narratives, mobilize peer networks, and contest state and corporate environmental claims. Campaigns opposing coal-fired power plants in Java or plastic waste imports into East Java, for example, reveal how digital spaces function as arenas of counter-hegemonic knowledge production, consistent with Earl et al.'s (2022) argument that digitally networked activism reshapes movement scale, temporality, and participation. These practices are particularly significant in Indonesia, where digital media often compensates for limited access to mainstream political channels.

In addition to protest and digital mobilization, youth activism frequently takes the form of community-based environmental initiatives, especially in climate-vulnerable regions. Youth collectives in coastal areas of Central Java and South Sulawesi engage in mangrove restoration and climate education programs aimed at strengthening local adaptive capacity, while urban youth groups organize waste banks, river clean-ups, and participatory environmental monitoring. These initiatives exemplify *prefigurative politics*, whereby activists enact alternative socio-ecological relations in the present rather than solely demanding future reforms (Monticelli, 2018; Yates, 2015). Importantly, such practices challenge critiques that youth climate activism is detached from

material concerns, instead demonstrating how activism is embedded within everyday environmental governance.

B. Influence on Climate Discourse and Policy

The findings indicate that Indonesian youth activists have played a significant role in reshaping public climate discourse, particularly by reframing climate change as an issue of justice, rights, and accountability rather than technical mitigation alone. Through media engagement, public statements, and storytelling strategies, youth activists have challenged dominant development narratives that prioritize economic growth and extractive industries. For instance, youth-led campaigns against coal expansion have foregrounded health impacts on children, intergenerational responsibility, and the moral contradictions of labeling coal as “development,” aligning with framing theory’s emphasis on moral shock and narrative resonance (Benford & Snow, 2000).

At the policy level, youth influence is most evident in agenda-setting and discursive inclusion, rather than direct policy transformation. Youth organizations have contributed to public consultations on climate policies, submitted shadow reports, and participated in civil society forums related to Indonesia’s Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). At international forums such as the UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties (COP), Indonesian youth delegates have engaged in advocacy through YOUNGO and regional youth networks, positioning themselves as norm entrepreneurs advocating for stronger mitigation targets and inclusive governance (Wallace, 2021). However, consistent with critical governance scholarship, the findings reveal that youth participation is often symbolic or consultative, reinforcing debates around tokenism and post-political inclusion in climate governance (Kenis & Mathijs, 2014; Newell, 2022).

C. Social Equity, Marginalized Communities, and Intersectionality

A defining feature of youth climate justice activism in Indonesia is its explicit engagement with social equity and marginalized communities. Youth activists frequently align with indigenous groups resisting land dispossession, coastal communities facing sea-level rise, and urban informal settlements exposed to flooding and pollution. Campaigns opposing palm oil expansion in Kalimantan or mining activities in eastern Indonesia illustrate how youth movements adopt political ecology perspectives that link environmental degradation to capitalist accumulation, state power, and historical marginalization (Robbins, 2012; Afiff & Rachman, 2019).

The findings further indicate that many youth movements adopt intersectional justice frameworks, recognizing that climate vulnerability is unevenly distributed along lines of class, gender, ethnicity, and geography. Female youth activists and feminist collectives, for example, emphasize the gendered dimensions of climate impacts, such as women’s disproportionate

burden in managing household water scarcity or disaster recovery. This aligns with feminist climate justice scholarship that critiques universalized notions of vulnerability and calls for differentiated, situated analyses (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014; Sultana, 2022).

Nevertheless, internal movement dynamics reveal ongoing tensions. While intersectionality is frequently articulated at the discursive level, translating these commitments into organizational practices remains challenging, particularly in movements dominated by urban, university-educated youth. These findings resonate with broader debates on representation and voice within Global South activism, highlighting the risk that climate justice movements may inadvertently reproduce existing social hierarchies even as they seek to contest them (Temper et al., 2023).

D. Challenges Facing Youth Activists in Indonesia

Despite their growing normative authority, youth climate justice activists in Indonesia confront multiple structural and affective challenges. The most persistent barrier is restricted access to formal decision-making spaces, where youth are often positioned as symbolic participants rather than legitimate political actors. Government-led climate forums frequently frame youth involvement as educational or inspirational, reinforcing age-based hierarchies that marginalize youth expertise and lived experience, a phenomenon widely critiqued in youth participation literature (Taft & Gordon, 2020).

Political resistance constitutes another significant challenge, particularly when youth activism directly confronts powerful economic interests linked to coal, mining, and large-scale infrastructure projects. Activists report experiences of delegitimization, surveillance, and intimidation, especially in regions where environmental advocacy intersects with land and labor conflicts. These dynamics reflect what political ecology scholars describe as the securitization and criminalization of environmental dissent (Temper et al., 2018).

Resource constraints further limit the sustainability of youth activism. Many initiatives rely on volunteer labor, short-term funding, and informal organizational structures, making them vulnerable to burnout and fragmentation. The findings reveal high levels of emotional exhaustion and climate anxiety among youth activists, echoing emerging scholarship on the affective dimensions of climate activism and the psychological burden of confronting ecological crises under conditions of limited political efficacy (Pihkala, 2020; Bowman, 2023). These challenges underscore the paradox faced by youth activists: while increasingly visible as moral agents of climate justice, they continue to operate within governance systems that systematically constrain their power and well-being.

E. Youth as Agents of Climate Justice

The findings of this study affirm that youth in Indonesia function not merely as participants in climate activism but as active agents of climate justice, whose interventions reshape political imaginaries, ethical framings, and governance practices. Consistent with intergenerational justice theory, youth activism articulates climate change as a moral and temporal injustice, wherein current political and economic decisions impose disproportionate burdens on future generations (Gardiner, 2017; Bowman, 2023). Indonesian youth activists mobilize this ethical claim to challenge developmentalist narratives that legitimize extractive growth while externalizing environmental costs to young and future populations.

Beyond moral claims, youth activism demonstrates transformative potential by expanding the substantive meaning of climate justice to encompass social equity, indigenous rights, labor precarity, and urban vulnerability. This aligns with political ecology and critical climate justice scholarship that conceptualizes climate change as embedded within broader structures of capitalism, coloniality, and social inequality (Robbins, 2012; Sultana, 2022). By linking climate action to everyday struggles over land, livelihoods, and health, youth-led movements in Indonesia move beyond single-issue environmentalism toward more holistic and justice-oriented forms of socio-political engagement.

Table 1. Youth as Agents of Climate Justice: Empirical Roles and Theoretical Contributions

Dimension of Agency	Empirical Expression in Indonesia	Key Theoretical Lens	Scholarly Debate Addressed
Moral and intergenerational claims	Youth framing climate change as theft of future rights; narratives opposing coal expansion and deforestation	Intergenerational justice (Gardiner, 2017)	Youth as moral vs. political actors
Discursive transformation	Reframing climate change as social injustice affecting coastal, indigenous, and urban poor communities	Framing theory; climate justice (Benford & Snow, 2000; Schlosberg, 2019)	Politicization vs. depoliticization of climate discourse

Dimension of Agency	Empirical Expression in Indonesia	Key Theoretical Lens	Scholarly Debate Addressed
Democratic innovation	Horizontal organizing, digital mobilization, participatory education	Deliberative democracy; prefigurative politics (della Porta, 2020)	Informal activism vs. institutional reform
Knowledge production	Translating scientific data into localized narratives via social media and community outreach	Epistemic justice (Sultana, 2022)	Whose knowledge counts in climate governance

Source: Various sources, edited by Authors

Moreover, youth activism operates as a site of democratic innovation, experimenting with horizontal organizing, digital mobilization, and prefigurative practices that challenge hierarchical and technocratic modes of governance. These practices resonate with social movement theories that emphasize the role of movements in generating alternative norms, identities, and political possibilities beyond institutional reform alone (della Porta, 2020). In this sense, youth activism contributes not only to climate justice advocacy but also to the reconfiguration of democratic participation in climate governance.

F. Structural Barriers to Youth Participation

Despite their growing visibility and normative influence, the study's findings underscore the persistence of structural barriers that constrain meaningful youth participation in climate governance. Institutional exclusion remains a central challenge, as youth engagement is often confined to consultative or symbolic roles within policy processes, reflecting entrenched age-based hierarchies and power asymmetries (Taft & Gordon, 2020; UNDP, 2022). Such forms of inclusion risk depoliticizing youth activism by incorporating youth voices without redistributing decision-making authority or addressing underlying injustices.

These barriers are further compounded by the political economy of climate governance in Indonesia, where state interests remain closely aligned with extractive industries and infrastructure development. Youth activists who contest these interests encounter resistance, delegitimization, and, in some cases, repression, illustrating how climate governance operates within contested fields

of power rather than neutral policy arenas (Newell, 2022; Temper et al., 2018). This dynamic supports critical governance scholarship that critiques post-political approaches to climate action, wherein participatory mechanisms coexist with limited space for substantive dissent (Kenis & Mathijs, 2014).

Table 2. Structural Barriers to Youth Participation in Climate Governance

Level	Identified Barrier	Indonesian Examples	Related Theory
Institutional	Tokenistic inclusion in policy consultations	Youth invited to climate forums without voting or agenda-setting power	Post-political governance (Kenis & Mathijs, 2014)
Political–economic	Alignment of state policy with extractive industries	Resistance to youth-led anti-coal and mining campaigns	Political ecology (Robbins, 2012)
Organizational	Limited funding and legal protection	Reliance on volunteer labor; short-term project funding	Resource mobilization theory
Affective	Activist burnout and climate anxiety	Emotional fatigue among long-term youth activists	Affective politics (Pihkala, 2020)

Source: Various sources, edited by Authors

The findings also highlight internal challenges within youth movements themselves, including resource constraints, organizational precarity, and activist burnout. These challenges raise important questions about the sustainability of youth-led climate justice activism and the uneven capacities of different youth groups to engage in long-term advocacy. Addressing these structural and organizational barriers is therefore essential to realizing the full transformative potential of youth participation.

G. Implications for Climate Governance and Policy

The study carries significant implications for climate governance and policy in Indonesia and other climate-vulnerable countries. First, it underscores the need to move beyond tokenistic forms of youth participation toward institutionalized and empowered mechanisms that enable young people to influence decision-making substantively. This may include formal youth

representation in climate councils, participatory budgeting for climate initiatives, and co-design processes that integrate youth knowledge and lived experience into policy formulation (Fisher & Nasrin, 2021; Kuokkanen et al., 2023).

Second, the findings suggest that integrating youth perspectives can enhance the legitimacy, inclusiveness, and effectiveness of climate policies by foregrounding justice-oriented and long-term considerations often marginalized in short-term political cycles. Youth activism offers valuable insights into localized vulnerabilities, social inequalities, and community-based solutions, which are critical for designing context-sensitive adaptation and mitigation strategies. Recognizing youth as partners rather than beneficiaries of climate policy represents a fundamental shift in governance paradigms.

Table 3. Implications of Youth Climate Activism for Climate Governance and Policy

Governance Dimension	Current Condition	Youth-Led Contribution	Policy Implication
Participation	Consultative and symbolic	Demand for co-decision and accountability	Institutionalize youth seats in climate councils
Policy framing	Technocratic and growth-oriented	Justice- and rights-based framing	Integrate social equity indicators into NDCs
Knowledge integration	Expert-driven	Local and experiential knowledge	Co-production of climate knowledge
Temporal horizon	Short-term political cycles	Long-term intergenerational focus	Align policy timelines with future risk

Source: Various sources, edited by Authors

The Indonesian case offers broader lessons for other climate-vulnerable countries in the Global South. It illustrates how youth activism can function as a catalyst for climate justice even under conditions of limited institutional openness and political resistance. At the same time, it highlights the risks of co-optation and burnout when youth participation is not supported by structural reforms. Comparative learning across contexts can therefore inform the development of more equitable and resilient climate governance frameworks that acknowledge youth as central actors in shaping sustainable futures.

Table 4. Lessons from Indonesia for Other Climate-Vulnerable Countries

Aspect	Indonesian Experience	Transferable Insight
Youth mobilization	Hybrid protest–community model	Combine confrontation with local solutions
Digital activism	High reliance on social media	Digital platforms can bypass institutional barriers
Justice framing	Strong linkage to land and livelihood issues	Climate justice must be context-specific
Governance challenge	Persistent tokenism	Youth inclusion must redistribute power

Source: Various sources, edited by Authors

Conclusion

A. Summary of Key Findings

This study set out to examine the role of young activists in Indonesia’s climate justice movement, situating youth engagement within broader debates on climate governance, social equity, and intergenerational justice. The findings demonstrate that youth activists occupy a central and multifaceted role in advancing climate justice in Indonesia. Far from being peripheral actors, young people function as moral claim-makers, knowledge brokers, and political mobilizers who challenge dominant technocratic and growth-oriented approaches to climate change.

Empirically, the study reveals that youth activism extends well beyond awareness-raising and symbolic protest. Indonesian youth-led movements actively engage in policy advocacy, community-based environmental action, and transnational climate governance, thereby influencing public discourse and contributing to agenda-setting across multiple scales. By linking climate change to issues of land rights, social inequality, and historical responsibility, youth activists advance justice-oriented framings that broaden the substantive scope of climate politics. These findings reinforce the argument that youth are not merely future beneficiaries of climate policy but present-day political actors whose participation is essential for equitable and sustainable climate governance.

B. Policy and Practice Recommendations

The conclusions of this study carry important implications for climate policy and practice in Indonesia and other climate-vulnerable contexts. First, there is an urgent need to institutionalize meaningful youth participation within climate decision-making processes. This requires moving beyond ad hoc consultations toward formal mechanisms that grant youth deliberative and decision-making

power, such as representation in national and subnational climate councils, participatory policy design forums, and youth-inclusive monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

Second, policymakers and development actors must address the structural precarity of youth activism by providing adequate resources and legal protections. Financial support for youth-led organizations, access to capacity-building programs, and safeguards against criminalization or intimidation are essential to ensuring the sustainability and safety of youth climate advocacy. Without such support, youth participation risks remaining uneven, exclusionary, and vulnerable to burnout.

Third, the study underscores the importance of supporting youth-led climate justice initiatives that operate at the grassroots level. Community-based projects, digital advocacy campaigns, and locally grounded adaptation efforts offer valuable insights into context-specific solutions and social innovations. Recognizing and scaling these initiatives can enhance the inclusiveness, legitimacy, and effectiveness of climate governance, while fostering a new generation of civic and environmental leadership.

C. Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides in-depth insights into youth climate justice activism in Indonesia, it is subject to several limitations. The qualitative and case-based design, while well suited to exploring meanings and practices, limits the generalizability of the findings across Indonesia's diverse socio-political and ecological contexts. Additionally, the focus on organized and visible forms of youth activism may underrepresent less formal or everyday practices of environmental engagement among marginalized youth populations.

Future research would benefit from longitudinal studies that track the evolution of youth climate activism over time, particularly in relation to shifting political opportunities, policy outcomes, and activist trajectories. Comparative research across regions and countries in the Global South could further illuminate how different governance contexts shape youth participation and influence. Finally, greater attention to intersectional dynamics—such as gender, class, and indigeneity—would deepen understanding of internal inequalities within youth movements and contribute to more inclusive theories of climate justice activism.

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