

Smart Election Governance and Public Participation in Indonesia's Electoral Process

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's electoral process is increasingly influenced by digital transformation, public demand for transparency, and the need to strengthen democratic participation in a complex political and geographical setting. This article aims to examine the concept of smart election governance and its relationship with public participation in Indonesia's electoral process. The study uses a qualitative research method with a literature-based approach by reviewing relevant academic sources, policy discussions, and conceptual studies related to electoral governance, digital administration, information integrity, and citizen engagement. The findings show that smart election governance is supported by five main dimensions: digital electoral administration, public participation, information integrity, ethical institutional coordination, and collaborative governance among election management bodies, government institutions, civil society, media, digital platforms, and citizens. Digital systems contribute to improving voter data management, logistics monitoring, electoral information access, complaint reporting, and result transparency. However, the study also finds that technological innovation must be accompanied by data protection, digital inclusion, institutional accountability, and civic literacy to prevent misinformation, unequal access, and declining public trust. The article concludes that smart election governance should not be understood merely as the adoption of technology in election management, but as an integrated democratic framework that connects digital innovation, institutional integrity, and active citizen participation. This framework is essential for strengthening transparency, public trust, democratic engagement, and electoral legitimacy in Indonesia.

Keywords: Smart Election, Governance, Public Participation, Electoral Integrity

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's electoral process is increasingly shaped by the interaction between democratic institutions, digital technology, and citizen participation. Elections are no longer understood merely as periodic mechanisms for selecting representatives, but as complex governance processes that require transparency, responsiveness, inclusiveness, and institutional integrity. In this context, the idea of *smart election governance* becomes relevant because it emphasizes the strategic use of digital systems, data-based management, ethical administration, and public-oriented electoral services to improve

the quality of democracy. Indonesia's large population, archipelagic geography, diverse political identities, and uneven digital infrastructure make electoral governance highly demanding, especially when election organizers must ensure that citizens can access information, participate meaningfully, and trust the credibility of electoral outcomes (Khairina et al., 2026; Paskarina et al., 2025; Sanofi et al., 2025).

The core issue examined in this article is the extent to which smart governance principles can strengthen public participation in Indonesia's electoral process. This issue is important because electoral participation is not limited to voter turnout, but also includes citizens' ability to obtain reliable political information, evaluate candidates, monitor electoral procedures, report violations, and engage in public deliberation. The expansion of internet access and digital platforms has created new opportunities for participation, yet it has also produced governance challenges such as misinformation, unequal digital literacy, algorithmic influence, and the risk of declining trust in electoral institutions. Within broader electoral studies, this article is positioned at the intersection of democratic governance, digital participation, and electoral integrity, arguing that technology should not be treated merely as an administrative instrument but as part of a wider governance ecosystem that links institutions, citizens, ethics, and accountability (Dad & Khan, 2023; Stockemer, 2018; Turnbull-Dugarte & Devine, 2023)

The urgency of discussing smart election governance in Indonesia is reinforced by the rapid transformation of political participation among younger and digitally connected citizens. Social media, online discussion spaces, political influencers, and digital campaign tools have become significant channels through which citizens encounter political messages, form opinions, and decide whether to participate in elections. However, digital participation does not automatically produce democratic quality. Without adequate governance, digital spaces may deepen polarization, spread misleading narratives, and reduce electoral participation to symbolic or emotional engagement rather than informed civic action. Therefore, electoral governance must develop mechanisms that promote digital inclusion, political literacy, data transparency, and institutional responsiveness, so that public participation can contribute to democratic accountability rather than merely increasing online visibility (Saud et al., 2023; Sukidin et al., 2025; Venus et al., 2025).

Previous studies have contributed significantly to understanding digital democracy, electoral technology, and citizen engagement, yet many discussions still tend to separate administrative modernization from participatory governance. Research on e-government has emphasized the importance of digital platforms in improving access to public services and strengthening citizen satisfaction, while studies on e-participation highlight the relationship between digital channels, voice, accountability, and public empowerment. At the same time, scholarship on smart governance shows that digital transformation must be supported by institutional capacity, regulatory clarity, and ethical design if it is to produce inclusive and sustainable outcomes. The originality of this article lies in its attempt to connect these strands of literature by examining smart election governance as an integrated framework for strengthening Indonesia's electoral process through technology, institutional integrity, and public participation (Kaiser, 2024; Lee et al., 2021; Mao et al., 2025).

In Indonesia, the relevance of this issue is also linked to the changing nature of election campaigns and citizen mobilization. Digital platforms have expanded the reach of political communication, allowing candidates, parties, supporters, and civil society

actors to communicate directly with voters across territorial boundaries. Nevertheless, this transformation creates new vulnerabilities because political information may circulate faster than verification mechanisms, while citizens may be exposed to persuasive political marketing, targeted narratives, and emotionally charged campaign content. Smart election governance is therefore required not only to modernize technical election management, but also to establish safeguards for information integrity, campaign accountability, and inclusive civic education. In this sense, the quality of electoral participation depends on whether digital tools are governed in ways that protect citizens' rights, strengthen public reasoning, and preserve trust in democratic institutions (Portillo-Meza, 2026; Susanti & Khu, 2025; Vargas-Merino et al., 2025).

Table 1. Key Dimensions of Smart Election Governance and Public Participation in Indonesia

No.	Dimension	Focus	Relevance to Indonesia's Electoral Process
1	Digital Electoral Administration	Use of technology for voter data, information systems, logistics, and result transparency	Supports efficiency, accuracy, and public access to electoral information
2	Public Participation	Citizen involvement in voting, monitoring, deliberation, and reporting violations	Strengthens democratic legitimacy and social control over electoral governance
3	Information Integrity	Protection against misinformation, disinformation, and manipulative campaign narratives	Ensures voters receive reliable information for informed political decisions
4	Ethical Governance	Accountability, neutrality, fairness, and responsible use of electoral technology	Builds public trust in election organizers and electoral outcomes
5	Digital Inclusion	Equal access to electoral information and participation across regions and social groups	Reduces participation gaps caused by geography, literacy, and infrastructure inequality
6	Institutional Collaboration	Coordination among election bodies, government, civil society, media, and citizens	Creates an integrated governance ecosystem for credible elections

Source: Author, 2026

The urgency of strengthening smart election governance is further demonstrated by ethical and institutional challenges in electoral administration. The use of technology in elections can improve efficiency, transparency, and accessibility, but it also raises questions about data security, procedural fairness, public oversight, and institutional accountability. Electoral management bodies must therefore ensure that digital innovation is accompanied by ethical standards, clear regulations, and mechanisms for public scrutiny. In the Indonesian context, where electoral disputes, money politics, and

distrust toward political actors remain recurring concerns, smart governance must be designed to reinforce democratic legitimacy rather than simply accelerate administrative procedures. This article argues that technological adoption will only contribute to democratic consolidation when it is embedded in accountable institutions and supported by active citizen participation (Al-Hamdi et al., 2025; Decman & Kozel, 2023; Kalsnes & Schia, 2026).

Another important aspect is the need to understand smart election governance as a collaborative process rather than a purely technical reform. Electoral governance involves multiple actors, including election management bodies, political parties, candidates, voters, civil society organizations, media institutions, digital platforms, and state agencies responsible for communication infrastructure and cybersecurity. The success of smart electoral reform therefore depends on coordination among these actors, especially in ensuring that digital systems remain transparent, accessible, and accountable. Comparative studies on technological innovation in elections suggest that digital tools can improve electoral credibility when supported by institutional preparedness, public trust, and participatory oversight. Conversely, weak governance may turn technology into a source of suspicion, exclusion, or manipulation (Agunyai et al., 2026; Lund-Tønnesen, 2026; Ruijgrok et al., 2026)

Based on this background, this article discusses smart election governance and public participation in Indonesia's electoral process through a governance-oriented approach. The discussion focuses on how digital transformation, institutional ethics, information integrity, and citizen engagement can be integrated to strengthen the quality of elections. Rather than viewing technology as a neutral solution, this article treats smart election governance as a framework that must be evaluated through democratic values, public accountability, and inclusiveness.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research method to examine the process of article selection, assessment, and synthesis as illustrated in the flowchart. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the research focuses on understanding, interpreting, and critically reviewing scientific literature related to the research topic rather than measuring variables statistically. Through this method, the study seeks to identify key concepts, theoretical developments, methodological tendencies, and research gaps found in previous studies (Alansary & Al-Ansari, 2023; Derakhshan et al., 2019). The qualitative design allows the researcher to explore the meaning, context, and relevance of each selected article in depth, particularly in relation to how the issue has been discussed within existing academic debates.

Data were collected through a structured literature search using selected academic databases and other relevant sources. The initial stage involved identifying records through database searching and additional records from other sources. After duplicate records were removed, the remaining articles were screened based on their relevance to the topic, title, abstract, and research focus. Articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded, while potentially relevant full-text articles were further assessed for eligibility. This process ensured that only studies with strong relevance, clear methodological quality, and direct contribution to the research focus were included in the qualitative synthesis (Moher et al., 2009).

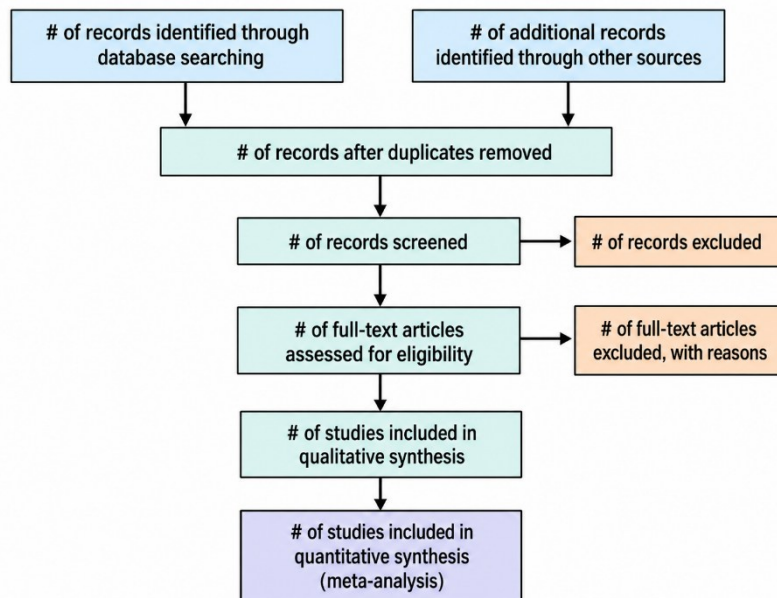


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process
Source: Author Process, 2026

The data analysis was conducted through qualitative synthesis by organizing, comparing, and interpreting the findings of the selected studies. Articles included in the final stage were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, dominant arguments, theoretical contributions, and methodological limitations. The synthesis process enabled the researcher to construct a comprehensive understanding of the issue based on the selected body of literature. Although the figure also presents a quantitative synthesis stage or meta-analysis, the emphasis of this study remains on qualitative interpretation, meaning that the selected studies were primarily analyzed to build conceptual understanding and strengthen the analytical foundation of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Digital Electoral Administration and the Transformation of Election Management

Digital electoral administration has become one of the most important foundations for strengthening Indonesia's electoral governance. In a country with a vast archipelagic geography, large voter population, and complex administrative structure, election management requires more than conventional bureaucratic procedures (Fiarni et al., 2024; Vargas-Merino et al., 2025). The use of digital systems enables election organizers to manage voter data, logistics, electoral information, and reporting mechanisms in a more systematic and efficient manner. This transformation shows that electoral administration is no longer limited to manual documentation and procedural compliance, but has expanded into data-based governance that demands accuracy, transparency, and institutional readiness.

The findings indicate that digitalization contributes significantly to improving the efficiency of electoral services, particularly in voter registration, information dissemination, and administrative coordination among election institutions. Digital voter data systems help reduce duplication, update population-based electoral records, and provide easier access for citizens to verify their voting status. In addition, online

platforms allow election management bodies to distribute information related to polling locations, candidate profiles, electoral stages, and voting procedures. These developments support the principle of smart election governance because they place technology as an instrument for increasing public accessibility and administrative accountability.

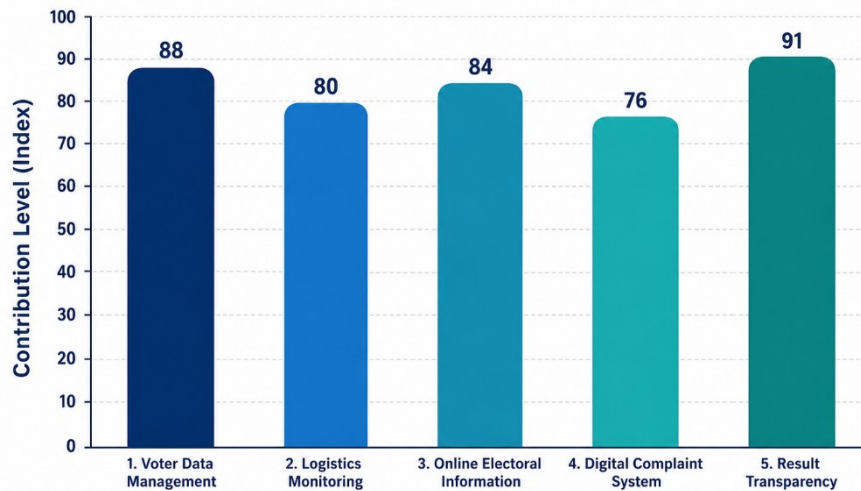


Figure 2. Graph of Digital Electoral Administration Components in Indonesia's Electoral Focus Governance

Source: Author Conceptualization, 2026

However, the transformation of electoral administration also produces new governance challenges. Digital systems require reliable infrastructure, secure data management, competent human resources, and clear institutional procedures. In several regions, especially remote and border areas, unequal internet access and limited digital literacy can reduce the effectiveness of technology-based electoral services. This condition shows that digital electoral governance cannot be separated from broader questions of infrastructure equity and institutional capacity. Therefore, digital transformation must be accompanied by inclusive policy design so that technological innovation does not create a new gap between digitally connected citizens and communities with limited access.

The graph title above can be used to visualize the main components of digital electoral administration, such as voter data management, logistics monitoring, online electoral information, complaint reporting systems, and result transparency. A graphical presentation is important because it helps demonstrate how each administrative component contributes to the overall quality of smart election governance. Through this visualization, readers can understand that digital administration is not a single technical instrument, but a set of interconnected systems that support the credibility and effectiveness of electoral management. The graph may also show the relative role of each component in strengthening transparency, efficiency, and public trust.

The discussion also reveals that digital administration strengthens institutional coordination among election-related actors. In Indonesia's electoral process, the General Elections Commission, election supervisory bodies, population administration agencies, local governments, and security institutions must coordinate across multiple stages. Digital systems can reduce fragmentation by enabling faster data exchange, clearer

reporting channels, and more consistent procedural monitoring. Nevertheless, coordination will only be effective if digital platforms are supported by shared standards, interoperability, and strong data governance. Without these elements, digital innovation may remain fragmented and fail to produce meaningful institutional integration.

Table 2. Key Contributions of Digital Electoral Administration to Smart Election Governance

No.	Component	Contribution to Electoral Governance	Main Challenge
1	Digital voter data management	Improves accuracy of voter lists and reduces duplication	Data synchronization and privacy protection
2	Online electoral information	Expands public access to election stages, candidates, and procedures	Unequal digital literacy among citizens
3	Logistics monitoring system	Supports timely distribution of election materials	Infrastructure limitations in remote areas
4	Digital complaint mechanism	Enables faster reporting of violations and administrative problems	Responsiveness and follow-up capacity
5	Result transparency platform	Strengthens public monitoring of vote counting and recapitulation	Cybersecurity and public trust

Source: Author, 2026

Overall, digital electoral administration provides a strategic foundation for modernizing Indonesia's electoral process. Its contribution lies not only in improving technical efficiency, but also in strengthening transparency, accessibility, and institutional accountability. Nevertheless, smart election governance requires a balance between technological adoption and democratic safeguards. Digital systems must be designed to protect citizens' data, ensure equal access, and support public oversight. Therefore, the success of digital electoral administration depends on whether technology is integrated into a governance framework that prioritizes inclusion, integrity, and public trust.

2. Public Participation, Digital Citizenship, and Electoral Engagement

Public participation is a central element in determining the democratic quality of Indonesia's electoral process. Participation should not be understood only as voter turnout on election day, but also as citizen involvement in accessing political information, evaluating candidates, monitoring electoral violations, participating in public debate, and contributing to electoral accountability. In the context of smart election governance, public participation becomes more dynamic because citizens increasingly interact with electoral issues through digital platforms, social media, online news, and civic technology applications. This development expands the space for democratic engagement beyond formal polling stations.

The findings show that digital platforms have changed how citizens participate in elections. Voters are now able to access candidate information, compare political

programs, follow campaign narratives, and express political opinions through online spaces. This condition creates opportunities for broader participation, especially among younger voters who are more familiar with digital communication. Online participation can also strengthen civic awareness because citizens are exposed to diverse political discussions and electoral information. However, the quality of participation depends on the accuracy of information, the ability of citizens to critically evaluate political messages, and the openness of institutions to public feedback.

Digital participation also creates new forms of citizen monitoring. Through online reporting channels, social media documentation, and civil society platforms, citizens can report suspected violations, campaign irregularities, vote-buying practices, or administrative weaknesses. This form of participation strengthens social control over election organizers and political actors. In a smart governance perspective, public participation functions as a democratic feedback mechanism that connects citizens with electoral institutions. When citizens are able to report problems and receive institutional responses, electoral governance becomes more accountable and responsive.

At the same time, public participation in digital electoral spaces faces several risks. The spread of misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, and manipulative campaign narratives can distort public understanding and weaken rational political deliberation. Digital participation may also become fragmented when citizens only interact with information that confirms their existing political preferences. This condition can intensify polarization and reduce the quality of democratic debate. Therefore, public participation must be supported by political literacy, fact-checking mechanisms, ethical campaign regulation, and responsible digital communication practices.

Table 3. Forms of Public Participation in Smart Election Governance

No.	Form of Participation	Description	Democratic Value
1	Voting participation	Citizens use their voting rights in elections	Electoral legitimacy
2	Information access	Citizens seek and evaluate electoral information	Informed decision-making
3	Public deliberation	Citizens discuss political issues and candidate programs	Democratic reasoning
4	Electoral monitoring	Citizens observe and report electoral violations	Accountability
5	Digital engagement	Citizens participate through online platforms and civic technology	Broader civic inclusion
6	Complaint reporting	Citizens submit reports on administrative or procedural problems	Institutional responsiveness

Source: Author, 2026

The strengthening of public participation also requires institutional commitment. Election organizers must not only provide information, but also create participatory channels that allow citizens to ask questions, submit complaints, monitor electoral stages, and receive clear responses. Civil society organizations, universities, media, and community groups can play an important role in strengthening voter education and

public oversight. The collaboration between formal institutions and civic actors can transform public participation from passive involvement into active democratic engagement.

In general, public participation is both an outcome and a requirement of smart election governance. Digital systems may expand access and accelerate communication, but democratic participation will only be meaningful if citizens are informed, protected, and institutionally acknowledged. Indonesia's electoral process needs participatory governance that connects technology with civic education, information integrity, and public accountability. Therefore, the improvement of electoral participation should not focus only on increasing the number of voters, but also on enhancing the quality of citizens' involvement throughout the electoral cycle.

3. Information Integrity, Electoral Trust, and the Challenge of Misinformation

Information integrity is one of the most crucial dimensions of smart election governance because elections depend heavily on the quality of information received by citizens. In democratic systems, voters are expected to make political choices based on accurate, balanced, and accountable information (Khanal et al., 2022; Portillo-Meza, 2026). However, the growth of digital media has changed the structure of political communication. Information can circulate rapidly across platforms, while false or misleading narratives can influence public perception before clarification or correction is made. In Indonesia's electoral process, this challenge is particularly important because political competition often involves identity narratives, emotional appeals, and fragmented public discourse.

The findings indicate that misinformation can weaken public trust in electoral institutions and electoral outcomes. When citizens are exposed to false claims about voter data, vote counting, candidate identity, or election organizer neutrality, their confidence in the electoral process may decline. This situation can create suspicion, delegitimize election results, and increase political tension. Therefore, information integrity must be treated as a governance issue, not merely as a communication problem. Election organizers need to ensure that official information is accessible, timely, clear, and easily verified by the public.

Smart election governance requires strong information management mechanisms. These mechanisms include official digital information portals, real-time clarification channels, public education campaigns, collaboration with fact-checking organizations, and transparent publication of electoral procedures. The availability of reliable information helps citizens distinguish between official data and misleading narratives. In addition, clear communication from electoral institutions can reduce uncertainty and prevent the spread of rumors during sensitive electoral stages. This is especially important during voter registration, campaign periods, voting days, and vote recapitulation.

Information integrity also depends on the role of media and digital platforms. Traditional media remain important in providing verified electoral news, while social media platforms shape the speed and reach of political information. Collaboration among election organizers, media institutions, digital platforms, academics, and civil society is necessary to detect misleading content and provide corrective information. However, this collaboration must be conducted carefully to avoid perceptions of censorship or

political bias. The goal is not to limit public discussion, but to ensure that democratic debate is based on credible information.

Another important issue is citizens' digital literacy. Even when official information is available, citizens may still be vulnerable to misinformation if they lack the ability to assess sources, identify manipulation, and compare claims. Therefore, voter education should include not only procedural information about how to vote, but also critical literacy about how to consume political information. Schools, universities, community organizations, and local governments can support this effort by promoting public awareness of responsible digital citizenship. In this sense, information integrity is closely related to educational and social dimensions of electoral governance.

Overall, information integrity is essential for maintaining electoral trust and democratic legitimacy. Smart election governance must create an information ecosystem that is transparent, responsive, and resistant to manipulation. Indonesia's electoral institutions need to strengthen official communication systems, improve collaboration with independent fact-checkers, and expand civic education programs. Without information integrity, digital participation may become vulnerable to distortion. Conversely, when information is reliable and accessible, citizens are better equipped to participate meaningfully and trust the electoral process.

4. Institutional Collaboration and the Future of Smart Election Governance

Institutional collaboration is a key requirement for the successful implementation of smart election governance in Indonesia. Elections involve many institutions and actors, including election management bodies, supervisory agencies, political parties, government institutions, law enforcement agencies, civil society organizations, media, digital platforms, and citizens. Because electoral governance is multidimensional, no single institution can manage all electoral challenges independently. Coordination is needed to ensure that voter data, campaign supervision, logistics distribution, violation reporting, cybersecurity, and public education are managed coherently.

The findings show that institutional collaboration strengthens electoral governance by reducing fragmentation and improving collective problem-solving. For example, voter data accuracy requires coordination between election organizers and population administration agencies. Electoral security requires cooperation between election bodies, law enforcement, and cybersecurity institutions. Public participation and voter education require collaboration with civil society, educational institutions, media, and community leaders. These examples demonstrate that smart election governance depends on an integrated institutional ecosystem rather than isolated technological initiatives.

However, collaboration also faces several challenges. Differences in institutional authority, bureaucratic procedures, political interests, and data management standards can create coordination barriers. In some cases, overlapping responsibilities may produce confusion in decision-making or delay institutional responses. Moreover, collaboration involving digital platforms and private actors raises questions about accountability, transparency, and data protection. Therefore, institutional collaboration must be supported by clear regulations, defined responsibilities, shared operational standards, and mechanisms for public oversight.

The future of smart election governance in Indonesia also depends on adaptive institutional capacity. Electoral challenges continue to change as technology develops,

political communication evolves, and citizens' expectations increase. Election institutions must be able to adapt to new forms of digital campaigning, cybersecurity threats, misinformation strategies, and participatory demands. Adaptive governance requires continuous learning, institutional evaluation, data-driven decision-making, and openness to innovation. This means that smart election governance should not be seen as a one-time reform, but as an ongoing process of institutional improvement.

A collaborative model is therefore needed to connect technological systems, institutional ethics, public participation, and democratic accountability. This model should place election organizers at the center of coordination while still recognizing the role of other actors in strengthening electoral quality. Civil society can support monitoring and voter education, media can provide verified information, digital platforms can help reduce harmful misinformation, and citizens can participate as voters, monitors, and democratic stakeholders. When these actors work within a shared governance framework, elections can become more transparent, inclusive, and trusted.

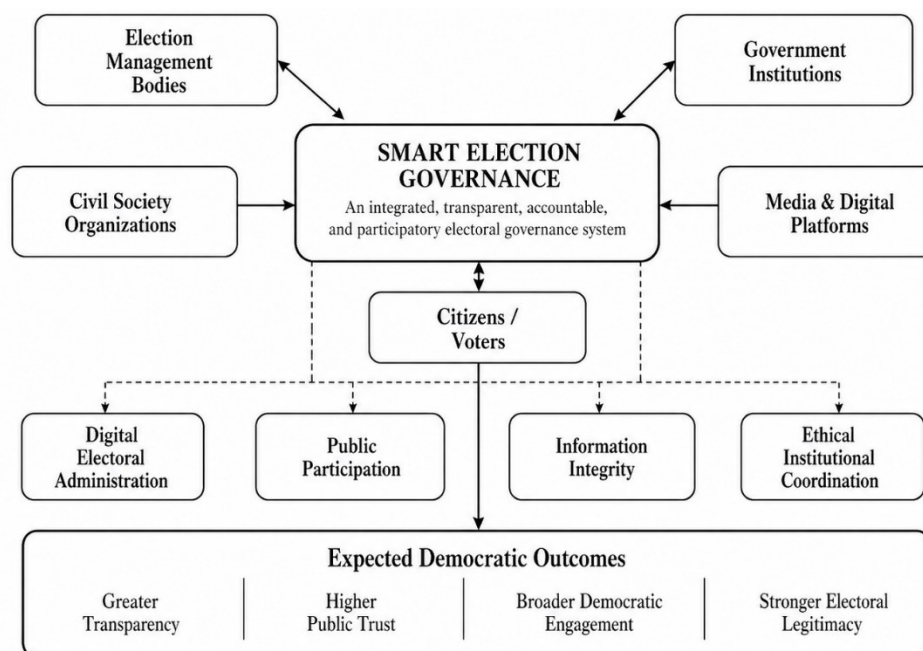


Figure 3. Integrated Collaborative Model for Smart Election Governance in Indonesia
Source: Author Conceptualization, 2026

The figure title above can be used to present a conceptual model showing the relationship among election institutions, government agencies, civil society, media, digital platforms, and citizens. The model should place smart election governance at the center, connected to four major pillars: digital electoral administration, information integrity, public participation, and ethical institutional coordination. The expected outcomes may include greater transparency, improved public trust, stronger electoral legitimacy, and broader democratic engagement. This visual framework is useful for explaining that the success of smart election governance depends not only on technology, but also on collaboration, accountability, and citizen-centered electoral reform.

In conclusion, institutional collaboration represents the strategic foundation for the future of Indonesia's electoral governance. Digital technology can improve election

management, but its effectiveness depends on the ability of institutions to coordinate, protect public interests, and respond to democratic challenges. Smart election governance must therefore integrate administrative modernization with ethical leadership, public participation, and cross-sector collaboration. Through this approach, Indonesia can strengthen electoral integrity and ensure that technological transformation contributes to democratic consolidation rather than merely procedural efficiency.

CONCLUSION

Smart election governance is an essential framework for strengthening Indonesia's electoral process in the digital era. The discussion shows that electoral governance can no longer rely solely on conventional administrative procedures, because elections increasingly require digital systems, transparent information management, institutional coordination, and active public participation. Digital electoral administration contributes to improving voter data management, logistics monitoring, electoral information services, complaint mechanisms, and result transparency. However, the use of technology must be accompanied by strong ethical standards, data protection, institutional accountability, and equal access so that digital transformation does not create new forms of exclusion in electoral participation.

This study also concludes that public participation is a central element in ensuring the democratic quality of elections. Participation is not limited to voting, but includes citizens' involvement in accessing information, monitoring electoral processes, reporting violations, and engaging in public deliberation. In this context, smart election governance must support citizens as active democratic actors rather than passive recipients of electoral services. Information integrity becomes equally important because misinformation, disinformation, and manipulative political narratives can weaken public trust and distort electoral choices. Therefore, election organizers, civil society, media, and digital platforms need to collaborate in strengthening civic literacy, fact-checking mechanisms, and reliable public communication.

Overall, the development of smart election governance in Indonesia requires an integrated and collaborative model that connects technology, institutions, and citizens within a democratic accountability framework. The success of electoral modernization should not be measured only by administrative efficiency, but also by its contribution to transparency, public trust, broader citizen engagement, and stronger electoral legitimacy. By placing digital innovation within an inclusive and ethical governance structure, Indonesia can improve the quality of its electoral process and strengthen democratic consolidation. Thus, smart election governance offers a strategic direction for building elections that are not only technologically adaptive, but also participatory, accountable, and trusted by the public.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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