

# NO VIRAL, NO JUSTICE: HANNAH ARENDT CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SPECTACLE POLITICS IN INDONESIAN DEMOCRACY

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**Abstract:** This article examines the “No Viral No Justice” phenomenon in Indonesia through the lens of Hannah Arendt’s political philosophy, particularly the concepts of *vita activa*, the public realm, power, and violence. The study aims to analyze how social media-driven viralization reshapes contemporary political action and legal responsiveness. Employing a qualitative research design, the study combines critical philosophical analysis with a comparative approach, conducting a hermeneutic reading of Arendt’s theoretical works alongside selected empirical cases of digital democracy and law enforcement practices in Indonesia. The findings reveal that the “No Viral No Justice” phenomenon signifies a crisis of institutional power, in which legal and governmental authorities increasingly respond to symbolic violence produced by viral public pressure rather than to constitutional norms and deliberative processes. The study’s originality lies in linking Arendt’s theory of the transformation of power into violence with contemporary practices of digitally mediated justice. Ultimately, the dominance of political spectacle undermines pluralism, intensifies polarization, and weakens both deliberative democracy and public trust.

**Keywords:** No Viral No Justice; Hannah Arendt; digital democracy; political spectacle; institutional power

**Abstrak:** Artikel ini mengkaji fenomena “No Viral No Justice” di Indonesia melalui perspektif filsafat politik Hannah Arendt, khususnya konsep *vita activa*, ruang publik, kekuasaan, dan kekerasan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana viralitas media sosial membentuk ulang praktik politik dan respons penegakan hukum kontemporer. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan mengombinasikan analisis filsafat kritis dan metode komparatif melalui pembacaan hermeneutik terhadap karya-karya Arendt serta kasus-kasus empiris demokrasi digital di Indonesia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa fenomena “No Viral No Justice” merefleksikan krisis kekuasaan institusional, di mana lembaga hukum dan pemerintahan bertindak bukan berdasarkan otoritas konstitusional, melainkan sebagai respons terhadap tekanan publik yang bersifat simbolik dan viral. Kebaruan studi ini terletak pada pengaitan teori Arendt tentang runtuhnya kekuasaan menjadi kekerasan dengan praktik penegakan hukum di era digital. Dominasi politik sebagai tontonan pada akhirnya melemahkan pluralisme, memperdalam

polarisasi, dan mengikis kepercayaan publik terhadap demokrasi deliberatif.

**Kata kunci:** No Viral No Justice; Hannah Arendt; demokrasi digital; spektakel politik; kekuasaan institusional.

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## Introduction

Over the past two decades, Indonesia's social and political landscape has undergone a radical transformation due to the accelerated penetration of digital technology. Data from *We Are Social* (2024) indicate that Indonesia has more than 221.56 million internet users, making it one of the countries with the largest digital user bases in the world. This development has reshaped the public sphere: social media has become a primary arena for political discourse, mass mobilization, and justice advocacy. According to Hudha (in Sukidin, 2025a), political interaction and digital activity in Indonesia have reconfigured how citizens understand democracy and participation, while Subekti (2025a) emphasizes the significant role of social media in shaping public opinion during the 2024 general election. In this regard, it is necessary to examine more deeply the relationality between the self and the text (the other) as a model of the integral unity of thought (Aliano, 2022; Aliano, 2023).

However, amid the promise of a more inclusive democracy, an ironic phenomenon has emerged, commonly referred to as "No Viral No Justice." This term reflects a public crisis of trust in the formal legal system, in which justice appears attainable only when a case receives massive public attention. Sudirman and Antony (2023) analyzed this phenomenon as a form of juridical failure, in which law enforcement depends on viral pressure rather than procedural mechanisms. From a psychological perspective, Rahmawati and Hidayat explain that the public act of viralizing legal cases reflects digital vigilantism, which is efforts to enforce justice through social pressure in online spaces (Ahdarrijal & Rahmawati, 2024).

This phenomenon also reveals a transformation in the nature of the digital public sphere. According to Jalli (2025), viral activism in Southeast Asia—particularly in Indonesia—demon-

strates a shift from rational deliberation to emotional politics grounded in spectacle and the attention economy. V-Dem (2024) and Freedom House (2024) recorded a decline in the quality of deliberative democracy in Indonesia, driven by widespread disinformation and polarization on digital platforms. This condition exposes a profound paradox: social media, initially promising democratic inclusivity, has become a site of symbolic contestation that blurs the boundary between power and popularity. Consequently, the “No Viral No Justice” phenomenon not only reflects a legal crisis but also signals the erosion of the public sphere as described by Hannah Arendt, wherein genuine political action is replaced by spectacle that demands attention rather than deliberation.

Hannah Arendt's thoughts in *The Human Condition* (1958) emphasize that authentic politics emerges from action in a public sphere that enables plurality and togetherness. In the digital context, the Arendtian public sphere has shifted from an arena of rational discourse to a visual and performative one. Jalli (2025) refers to this phenomenon as the “politics of spectacle,” in which digital participation is oriented more toward attracting attention (*attention politics*) than toward building deliberation. Within Arendt's framework, when action is replaced by performance, power loses its foundation and is supplanted by symbolic violence.

Sukidin and Hudha (2025) as well as Rustamaji (2025) show that social media expands political participation, particularly among the younger generations. However, Subekti (2025) warns that social media also serves as a vehicle for the dissemination of disinformation in electoral contests. According to the V-Dem report (2024), Indonesia's deliberative democracy index has declined because the digital public sphere is frequently dominated by emotional narratives, hate speech, and identity politics. Thus, digital participation does not automatically enhance democratic quality; instead, it risks creating echo chambers that weaken public rationality.

Research by Sudirman and Antony (2023) and Ahdarrijal and Rahmawati (2024) highlights that the “No Viral No Justice” phenomenon signifies a loss of trust in formal legal institutions.

In many cases, social media virality functions as a form of “public tribunal” that replaces judicial mechanisms. In *On Violence* (1970), Arendt asserts that violence emerges when power collapses; in other words, when law fails as a source of justice, society turns to “digital violence” through social pressure in online spaces. This phenomenon reflects the loss of power (the capacity to act in concert) and the rise of violence (emotional coercion through virality).

In digital society, politics becomes a spectacle that demands constant attention. This phenomenon is closely tied to the attention economy, in which platform algorithms determine what is deemed “worthy” of attention. Arendt (1958) argues that when politics is reduced to spectacle, the public sphere loses its existential meaning. In Indonesia, this is evident in the dominance of legal cases that only gain attention after going viral. As noted by Jalli (2025), activism on TikTok and Twitter often generates strong emotional effects but does not necessarily lead to institutional change. From an Arendtian perspective, this reflects the failure of *vita activa* to achieve meaningful action.

The “No Viral No Justice” phenomenon invites deep reflection on how justice is understood in the digital era. Justice no longer emerges from rational processes but from performativity and collective pressure. Arendt warns that a society that loses its authentic public sphere will become trapped in a mass society devoid of a reflective capacity. In Indonesia, this crisis risks eroding democratic legitimacy and the rule of law. Therefore, efforts are needed to revitalize the digital public sphere as a space for dialogue that fosters trust and shared moral responsibility. Based on the foregoing context, this study seeks to address three main research questions: How can Hannah Arendt’s concept of *vita activa*—particularly action—and the public sphere be used to analyze the “No Viral No Justice” phenomenon in Indonesian democracy? Within the context of the politics of spectacle, how does the “No Viral No Justice” phenomenon reflect the failure of power and the adoption of elements of violence according to Arendt? What are the philosophical and political implications of the dominance of political spectacle for the quality of deliberative democracy in Indonesia?

This study employs a qualitative approach using comparative and critical-philosophical methods to examine the “No Viral No Justice” phenomenon within Indonesia’s socio-political context through the theoretical framework of Hannah Arendt. This approach is considered the most appropriate for linking abstract concepts such as *vita activa*, the public sphere, and power with the concrete dynamics of Indonesia’s contemporary digital society. The first stage involves a philosophical (hermeneutic) analysis of Arendt’s key works, particularly *The Human Condition* (1958) and *On Violence* (1970), reinterpreting the concepts of labor, work, action, and public space to understand political practices on social media shaped by viral performance. Hermeneutics is thus used not only to interpret Arendt’s texts but also to extend their theoretical relevance to the context of Indonesia’s digital democracy.

The second stage consists of contextual analysis through case studies of social and legal phenomena in Indonesia, including legal cases and civic protests that gained institutional attention only after becoming viral on social media. This stage draws on empirical data and public discourse, supported by secondary sources from the Judicial Commission, Freedom House (2024), and V-Dem (2024). The final stage applies a critical-comparative analysis that juxtaposes philosophical interpretation with empirical findings, demonstrating how political action has shifted from deliberative praxis toward spectacle-driven politics. Contemporary studies indicate that “No Viral No Justice” generates an attention-based form of political legitimacy that often replaces formal legal mechanisms. By contrasting this condition with Arendt’s ideal of the public sphere as a realm of appearance, this research reveals an ethical shift in public life—from acting together to appearing for attention—while reassessing the relevance of Arendt’s political thought in Indonesia’s digital landscape.

### **No Viral No Justice: Legitimacy Crisis and the Digital Transformation of the Legal Public Sphere**

The *No Viral No Justice* (NVNJ) phenomenon has become one of the most salient representations of digital democratic dynamics in Indonesia. The term reflects both social criticism

and collective public frustration toward legal institutions perceived as unresponsive to injustice unless a case goes viral on social media (Grecya & Yahya, 2022; Fitriani, 2025). In practice, justice increasingly appears to depend more on the extent to which public attention can be mobilized through digital screens than on the integrity of a legal system that is expected to be independent and transparent.

The controversy surrounding virality as a response to the crisis of public trust is not merely a temporary trend but a mirror of declining confidence in law enforcement institutions (Elliott et al., 2024). Rohan Pratama, Utami, and Ponco Aji find that low legal legitimacy drives citizens to seek alternative channels to demand justice. Social media thus functions as a shortcut to a formal system perceived as slow and biased (Rianto, 2023). The classic slogan “the law is harsh on the weak but lenient toward the powerful” gains renewed relevance in the digital era, as marginalized citizens are often heard only after attracting massive public attention (Gussela, 2024).

Within this framework, virality has transformed into a new form of civic engagement. As Grecya and Yahya (2024) explain, the public is no longer merely a consumer of news but an active political actor capable of exerting pressure on the state through digital participation. Consequently, the legal public sphere has undergone a transformation—from an institutional arena to a participatory digital space governed by algorithms and public opinion.

Between substantive justice and digital justice, virality frequently acts as a trigger for rapid responses from legal institutions. Cases such as the late Laura Anna’s legal struggle illustrate how public pressure can reopen legal avenues that were previously closed (Runturambi, 2024). Nevertheless, this phenomenon contains a serious paradox. When justice depends on virality, those without access to public visibility remain marginalized, producing a new form of legal inequality—digital inequality.

Fitriani (2025) emphasizes that the NVNJ phenomenon generates tension between the rule of law and the rule of viral. Law enforcement agencies tend to respond to viral cases due to intense social and political pressure rather than professional

obligation alone. Meanwhile, Ayu (2025) warns that such practices may evolve into digital vigilantism—online crowd justice that often violates due process of law and the rights of the accused.

Moreover, the dark side of NVNJ appears in the phenomenon of *trial by social media*, where public opinion assumes the role of formal courts. In digital spaces, speed often sacrifices accuracy and proportionality. Cases such as “Justice for Audrey” and “Satpam Nasarius” demonstrate how reputations can be destroyed even before legal proceedings begin. Hanuring Ayu (2025) notes that in this context, social media functions as a *court of public opinion* that judges without procedure, where truth is determined by emotional narratives rather than evidence. This reveals an epistemological tension between substantive justice, which requires reflection and lengthy processes, and digital justice, which is instant, emotional, and often destructive. Under such conditions, virality ceases to be merely an advocacy tool and can become a new instrument of oppression.

The impact of NVNJ also extends into Indonesian politics and public policy. Movements such as “17+8 People’s Demands” illustrate how viral power can transform public discourse into tangible political pressure. When public narratives escalate on social media, political institutions such as the House of Representatives are compelled to respond swiftly to avoid a legitimacy crisis (Ahdarrijal & Rahmawati, 2023). This has given rise to the term *viral-based policy*, referring to policymaking driven not by rational planning but by digital public pressure (Rohan Pratama, 2024). Gussela (2024) argues that from a sociology of law perspective, this pattern signals a shift in legal legitimacy—from procedural to performative—where the validity of public decisions is measured by online visibility and engagement.

Despite its distortions, virality also carries positive potential. Within the framework of *sousveillance*—bottom-up monitoring by citizens—social media can function as an accountability mechanism that constrains abuses of power (Rianto, 2023). However, as Ayu (2025) and Gussela (2024) caution, such civic control can only remain healthy if accompanied by adequate digital literacy and respect for the principles of formal justice.

Thus, the central challenge for Indonesian democracy lies in balancing the power of digital publics with formal legal legitimacy. Legal reform must strengthen institutional responsiveness without surrendering to viral pressure, while society must cultivate ethical awareness that justice should not become a commodity measured by views or trending hashtags.

Ultimately, the *No Viral No Justice* phenomenon exposes a paradox of justice in the digital era: when law loses legitimacy, the public assumes its role through social media. Yet dependence on virality only deepens the crisis of trust in the rule of law. Genuine justice must rest on a strong, transparent, and credible legal system—not on algorithmic pressure. Indonesia now stands at a crossroads between allowing justice to be determined by likes and shares, or rebuilding public trust through meaningful, ethical legal reform.

### **Vita Activa: Labor, Work, and Action in a Contemporary Arendtian Perspective**

In the classic reading of *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt interprets *vita activa* as consisting of three fundamental forms of human activity: labor, work, and action. Together, these activities constitute the existential foundation of human life in the world, yet each operates within a distinct ontological domain. Labor is rooted in the biological cycle of life and the basic human need for survival; work creates the relatively stable, artificial world of human artifacts; while action constitutes the realm of freedom in which human beings disclose their unique identities through interaction with others (Arendt, 1958/1998).

This conceptual framework has been continuously reexamined by contemporary thinkers. Charlton (2025), in his article *Arendt among the Machines: Labour, Work and Action in Technological Modernity* published in *Hannah Arendt Studies*, argues that modern technological advancement has blurred the boundaries between these three spheres of activity. Automation and artificial intelligence, he suggests, have “digitalized labor,” making it increasingly difficult to distinguish it from technical activities that once belonged to the domain of work. Yet Charlton emphasizes that it is precisely under these conditions that Arendt’s understanding of action—as an activity that affirms

freedom and human plurality—becomes increasingly urgent. The digital world presents new challenges to human autonomy, as action now unfolds within virtual public spaces mediated by algorithms.

Waelen, writing in the *Journal of Business Ethics*, contends that a renewed reading of *vita activa* enables a deeper understanding of the relationship between humans, work, and automation (Waelen, 2025). He argues that automation is not merely an economic phenomenon but also an ethical and existential problem. In a world of labor increasingly governed by technology, the meaning of work must be restored—not as the mere production of objects, but as a contribution to the “common world.” This position resonates with Daus (2024), who warns that public digitalization risks eroding the shared world that, for Arendt, constitutes the foundation of politics.

Nilsson, in *Studies in Philosophy & Education*, further highlights the importance of democratic education within the framework of *vita activa*. He maintains that action acquires genuine meaning only under conditions of plurality and public presence (Nilsson, 2025). In a digital world fragmented by algorithms and information bubbles, action often loses its dialogical context. Democratic education, therefore, must cultivate the capacity to act in the presence of others—that is, within a space where freedom can be actualized. Nilsson's argument reinforces Ozola's interpretation in the *Athens Journal of Philosophy*, which emphasizes that freedom in Arendt is not merely a political condition but a “mode of thinking and acting” grounded in the capacity to initiate something new (Ozola, 2023).

In a contemporary context, Zhang offers a reinterpretation of *vita activa* within platform societies in *AI & Society*. He argues that the digital world has produced a new form of digital action—actions that take place in virtual spaces through online communication and digital performativity (Zhang, 2024). However, Zhang cautions that digital action often lacks the dialogical depth central to Arendt's concept of action, as it is frequently trapped within the logic of spectacle and algorithmic visibility. From this perspective, social phenomena such as “No Viral No Justice” in Indonesia can be understood as a degeneration of the

public sphere: algorithmically mediated actions lose their genuine political meaning and are reduced to reactive performances driven by superficial visibility.

Villalobos, writing in *Political Theory*, likewise underscores the relevance of the relationship between power, violence, and action in the twenty-first century. He demonstrates that, for Arendt, power arises only when people act *in concert*—together—in a public space opened by speech and action (Villalobos, 2023). Power is not domination, but a collective energy generated through togetherness. This is why action without speech risks losing meaning, while speech without action loses authenticity. This view aligns with Berkowitz’s observation that in the age of social media, the public sphere has undergone “performative fragmentation,” wherein words and deeds are often separated by digital mediation, rendering power temporary and shallow (Brown, 2023). Moran adds a practical dimension to this discussion through his study of youth climate activism in *Theory, Culture & Society*. He shows that movements such as *Love Makes Robots* represent authentic forms of action because they integrate speech, action, and the courage to appear in public (Moran, 2025). According to Orman, such activism embodies humanity’s capacity to initiate something new—a “politics of liveliness” that Arendt identifies as the core of human freedom.

In the Indonesian context, Koten connects Arendt’s thought with participatory democracy in the digital era. He argues that *vita activa* can serve as a critical lens for evaluating new forms of online participation that often lose their deliberative substance (Koten, 2023a). Digital actions that appear free are, in fact, constrained by the logic of visibility and virality, leaving only *appearance without presence*. This insight reinforces Arendt’s concern over the disappearance of the public sphere as a space in which human beings affirm their identities and construct a shared world.

Overall, contemporary reflections on *vita activa* reaffirm that labor, work, and action remain the most powerful framework for understanding human existence in the midst of digital modernity. As Arendt emphasizes, human action always entails symbolic and communicative dimensions: “words and deeds are

not separate, where words are not empty and deeds are not brutal." In a fast-paced and spectacular digital world, the greatest challenge facing humanity is to preserve the unity of speech and action, so that freedom is not reduced to mere performance and action remains an event that genuinely builds a common world.

### **Freedom, Natality, and Plurality in Human Action**

Two fundamental characteristics of action, according to Hannah Arendt, are freedom and plurality. Within Arendt's framework, freedom is not reduced to the capacity to choose among given alternatives; rather, it is an existential spontaneity—the capacity to begin something new, to do the unexpected, and thereby to introduce a beginning into the world. Arendt understands genuine action as a manifestation of *vita activa* that enables human beings to appear as free agents through initiative and participation in the public realm (Werang, n.d.). For Arendt, freedom is rooted in natality—in the fact that every human being is born and carries the potential to initiate something new. In *the Human Condition*, she emphasizes that “the very nature of beginning is that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before. The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him” (HC, 177–178). Freedom, therefore, is not the opposite of necessity but the capacity to act beyond determination, opening possibilities and hopes for what does not yet exist.

As Tuwanakotta (2024) argues, the concept of political natality constitutes the core of Arendt's theory of action. Natality symbolizes the “birth of the political human,” namely the capacity of each individual to bring forth a new world through collective action in the public sphere. In this sense, every political action is a form of participation in an ongoing process of creation, in which human beings are not merely products of history but subjects capable of initiating new historical trajectories.

Similarly, Dose and Waton (2025) emphasize that freedom in Arendt's thought is relational and public in nature. Genuine freedom is not an inner or purely moral experience of the individual; it arises when human beings act together with others

in a public space that allows dialogue, debate, and self-disclosure through words and deeds. In this space, human beings appear as *zoon politikon*, creatures who find their freedom in social interaction and political praxis. Arendt thus rejects a notion of freedom confined to interiority and replaces it with a freedom that appears before others.

Revolution serves as a concrete example of free action in Arendt's sense. She writes that "revolutions are the only political events which confront us directly and inevitably with the problem of beginning" (*On Revolution*, 21). Revolutions mark collective efforts to establish new political spaces in which freedom can emerge as a worldly reality. The examples Arendt frequently cites—the American Revolution, the Paris Commune of 1871, the Russian Soviets, and resistance to totalitarianism—demonstrate how human beings, in moments of crisis, dare to interrupt the routines of private life in order to create shared spaces where freedom can reappear (Werang, 2025; Dose & Waton, 2025).

Such action, however, can never occur in isolation. This is where plurality becomes the ontological condition of human action. Arendt famously states that plurality is "the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world" (HC, 7). Plurality is the basic condition of political life, since action acquires meaning only through the presence and recognition of others. Without plurality, there would be no space for action to appear, to be acknowledged, and to be rendered meaningful.

According to Akin (2024), plurality in Arendt's thought can be understood as a universal affirmation of difference: human beings are bound together by existential sameness, yet no individual is ever interchangeable with another. In other words, plurality contains a dialectic of sameness and difference that makes a common world possible. Argirò (2024), from a contemporary feminist perspective, interprets Arendtian plurality as a space in which diverse experiences and births can reshape the meaning of politics and action. Meanwhile, Ayom Mratita Purbandani and Mahaswa (2022) highlight the gendered and symbolic dimensions of natality, emphasizing that action as

beginning always presupposes the courage to give birth to the world anew, even from the margins of history.

Taken together, these reflections show that, for Arendt, human action is simultaneously a phenomenon of freedom, natality, and plurality. Freedom provides the power to begin, natality offers the ontological ground for new beginnings, and plurality supplies the intersubjective space in which action acquires meaning. As Werang (2025) affirms, genuine action is action that “emerges from the spontaneity of freedom and is oriented toward a shared world inhabited in plurality.” Human beings, as *homo agens*, are therefore not merely beings who labor (*animal laborans*) or fabricate (*homo faber*), but beings capable of acting together with others and bringing something new into the world. In a modern world that tends to close off spaces for authentic action through the dominance of bureaucracy and technology, Arendt's thought stands as a call to restore the true meaning of politics—not power over others, but the capacity to begin together with others for the sake of a world that can be shared.

### **Arendt's Conception of Citizenship**

In discussing citizenship, Hannah Arendt does not begin from a legal or moral framework, but from the perspective of political action and the public realm. For Arendt, citizenship is an active experience of being a citizen in a common world, where individuals act, speak, and appear as free and equal political subjects. In this context, two central themes constitute Arendt's conceptual framework: (1) the public realm, and (2) political agency and collective identity. These two themes help illuminate Arendt's contribution to modern democratic theories of citizenship, particularly in relation to digital public spaces and participatory citizenship in contemporary Indonesia.

### ***Citizenship and the Public Realm***

For Arendt, the public realm has two interrelated dimensions. First is the *space of appearance*, the space in which citizens disclose their identity and freedom through action and speech. Second is the *common world*, the shared world built through work, institutions, and socio-political arrangements that provide stability for human activities (Werang, 2025). Together, these

dimensions constitute the preconditions of citizenship: the former provides a space for action, while the latter supplies a context of continuity in which action becomes meaningful.

In the Indonesian context, the Arendtian public realm can be reinterpreted through the practice of digital citizenship, where citizens utilize social media as a new *digital space of appearance*. However, as shown by Arditama, Lestari, and Munandar (2024), digital spaces also introduce ethical and political challenges, including shifting boundaries between public and private interests. Citizens now negotiate their identities not only in streets and parliaments, but also online, where political action is often mediated by algorithms and visibility (*no viral, no justice*).

First, the artificial nature of the public realm. Arendt conceives political life as entirely artificial—that is, a human creation rather than a natural product (Koten, 2023b). The public realm is constituted through collective action and political institutions, not through “natural law” or “cultural destiny.” Political equality, therefore, does not stem from natural human conditions but is achieved through active participation in a humanly constructed public space. Equality is the result of political action, not its precondition (Werang, 2025). Arendt’s emphasis on the artificial character of politics rejects the notion that political communities can be founded on racial, religious, or ethnic sameness. In Indonesia’s plural society, this perspective reinforces the idea that political membership should be grounded not in primordial identity but in the willingness to act and deliberate within a shared public realm (Ibnu, 2024).

Second, the spatial dimension of politics. The political realm necessarily has a spatial dimension because it requires presence and concrete interaction among citizens. Arendt stresses that genuine politics is possible only when people appear together in the same space to act and speak (Werang, 2025). Cian Ibnu Sina and colleagues (2024) interpret Arendt’s public realm as a form of social praxis that affirms the existence of a concrete common world, both within institutional arrangements and within symbolic spaces of mutual recognition. In contemporary Indonesia, however, political space faces new forms of fragmentation due to digitalization and legal constraints. Arpanudin and

Dewantara show that Indonesian migrant children in Sabah and Sarawak inhabit a “liminal legal space” that restricts their citizenship status. This condition demonstrates how public space—both physical and legal—can function as a mechanism of exclusion, in which individuals are denied recognition as full citizens (Arpanudin & Dewantara, 2025).

Third, the distinction between public and private interests. One of Arendt's major contributions is her sharp distinction between public and private concerns. Political activity is not a means to achieve personal goals but an end in itself—namely, the realization of freedom, justice, and solidarity within a common world (Werang, 2025). According to Arditama et al. (2024), in the digital era the boundary between public and private interests has become increasingly blurred, as civic actions on social media are often driven by personal motives such as self-presentation, popularity, or algorithmic incentives, which obscure orientation toward the common good.

By contrast, Arendt insists that public interest is inseparable from the common world that transcends individual lives. This world cannot be reduced to an aggregation of private interests, as it is both the product and the purpose of collective action by citizens committed to the continuity of their political community. In the context of citizenship education, Kasmawati (2023) highlights the importance of cultivating ecological awareness as a form of public citizenship that moves beyond individual interests toward shared responsibility for the world.

### ***Citizenship, Agency, and Collective Identity***

Arendt's conception of participatory citizenship provides the foundation for addressing two central issues: (a) the formation of collective identity and (b) the exercise of political agency. Together, these dimensions illustrate how citizens emerge as active political subjects within a common world.

First, collective identity. Collective identity is the outcome of shared action and deliberative processes in the public realm. Arendt rejects the view that political identity is inherited; for her, identity is constituted through action, speech, and mutual recognition. This process is inherently dynamic and negotiative

(Werang, 2025). Empirical studies by Arpanudin and Dewan-tara (2023) demonstrate how the collective identity of Indonesian citizens can be delayed and fragmented by uncertain legal status. Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia, for example, experience a form of “citizenship liminality”—a condition in which they are recognized as human beings but not fully as citizens. This situation underscores the relevance of Arendt’s insight that the public realm is a prerequisite for the emergence of politically recognized collective identity. Without an open and inclusive public space, citizens lack the means to appear as part of a political “we.”

Second, political agency. For Arendt, political agency does not reside in representation but in direct action within the political community. She rejects representative systems that distance citizens from the lived experience of public freedom. Instead, Arendt proposes the council system—a political form that enables citizens to deliberate directly and to shape the direction of their community (Werang, 2025).

In the digital context, this conception faces new challenges. Novelli and Sandri (2024) argue that digital democracy in the age of artificial intelligence requires a redefinition of civic agency. Technology is not merely a neutral instrument but a structuring force that can either expand or constrain the capacity to act. When algorithms replace deliberation, citizens risk losing political autonomy. Revitalizing political agency, therefore, entails restoring spaces for conscious, deliberative, and collective human action.

### **Judgment and Politics: Two Approaches**

The previous discussion has emphasized the moral significance of the activities of thinking and judging. For Hannah Arendt, however, the capacity for judgment is no less important as a political faculty, insofar as it enables individuals to orient themselves within the public realm and to assess the phenomena that appear there from a relatively detached and impartial standpoint. Villa emphasizes that, for Arendt, judging, thinking, and willing constitute three interrelated faculties that shape the dynamic relation between the inner life and the public life of human beings (Villa, 2023). Judgment thus functions as a bridge

between reflective inwardness and political action, allowing individuals to evaluate without succumbing to collective or ideological pressures.

Together with her theory of action, Arendt's unfinished theory of judgment stands as a central legacy of her contribution to twentieth-century political thought. This section traces several key aspects of Arendt's account of judgment and examines its place within the broader architecture of her political theory. Unlike her theory of action, Arendt never developed a systematic theory of judgment. She originally intended to complete her study of *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* by dedicating the third volume of *The Life of the Mind* to the faculty of judgment, but her sudden death in 1975 prevented its completion (Villa, 2023).

What remains are dispersed reflections found in *The Life of the Mind*, her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, the essay "Thinking and Moral Considerations," and two essays in *Between Past and Future* in which judgment and opinion are discussed in relation to culture and truth ("The Crisis in Culture" and "Truth and Politics"). These writings do not amount to a unified theory of judgment but instead reveal two seemingly opposed models: one grounded in the perspective of the actor, and the other in that of the spectator (Arendt, 1968; 1978).

Arendt's writings on judgment can thus be read as unfolding in two distinct phases. The first conceives judgment as a faculty of political actors who act within the public realm. The second understands judgment as the prerogative of spectators—those who do not directly participate but seek to grasp the meaning of political actions from a reflective distance. Zeldes-Roth (2024) interprets this duality not as a contradiction but as a dialectic: actors actualize judgment through action, while spectators restore its meaning through reflection. In contemporary mass society, the distinction between actor and spectator has increasingly blurred, as publics now function simultaneously as observers and participants within digital political spaces.

In the first account, developed in "The Crisis in Culture" and "Truth and Politics," Arendt conceives judgment as a distinctive political capacity: "the ability to see things not only from one's own point of view but from the perspective of all those who are

present in the common world” (Arendt, 1968, p. 221). Judgment is rooted in *common sense* (*sensus communis*), which allows shared experience to serve as the foundation of political life. For this reason, judgment is “one of the activities—perhaps the most important one—in which this sharing-the-world-with-others actually comes to pass” (Arendt, 1968, p. 221). Arendt further emphasizes the non-coercive character of judgment: it can only persuade (*peithein*), never compel agreement. This form of persuasion constitutes the distinctive mode of political communication that separates human action from violence (Arendt, 1968, p. 222).

In the digital age, Arendt’s conception of judgment as a non-coercive political practice is increasingly challenged by algorithmic logics. Longo (2025) shows that social media algorithms mediate and reshape how individuals judge within the public realm. Judgment, which once required distance and impartiality, now occurs within systems governed by virality and algorithmic filtering. As a result, digital public spaces often inhibit the capacity to “think from the standpoint of others,” since individuals are enclosed within filter bubbles that reinforce their own views (Daus, 2024). This condition fragments political judgment, which ought to be deliberative and communicative, into closed and polarized opinion spaces.

In the second account, Arendt grounds political judgment in Kant’s aesthetics, particularly in the *Critique of Judgment*, which she famously regarded as containing Kant’s unwritten political philosophy (Arendt, 1982, pp. 219–220). Here, spectators occupy a privileged position, capable of judging impartially and disinterestedly by activating two key faculties: imagination and *sensus communis* (Tuwanakotta, 2024). Through imagination, one can represent objects that are no longer immediately present and establish the distance required for impartial judgment. Once this distance is achieved, one can reflect on these representations from multiple perspectives and arrive at a judgment regarding the appropriate value of an object or action (Villa, 2023).

Kant argues that valid judgment requires transcendence from purely subjective conditions toward a public and intersubjective standpoint, made possible through *sensus communis*. The criterion of judgment, therefore, is

communicability—whether a judgment can be shared with and understood by others. Arendt (1982) emphasizes that Kant's focus on communicability in judgments of taste is closely tied to his idea of universal humanity as the foundation of perpetual peace. She writes: "With the idea of humanity present in every single person, men are humanized, and they can be called civilized to the extent that this idea becomes the principle not only of their judgments but of their actions as well" (*Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, p. 75).

These reflections gain renewed relevance in authoritarian and digital contexts. Tan (2024) shows that under totalitarian regimes, the inner capacity for judgment and freedom of thought is undermined by systems of power that eliminate moral reflection. In such conditions, judgment can no longer be exercised publicly and must instead be preserved within the inner life as a form of ethical resistance. Meanwhile, contemporary developments in Indonesia reveal new forms of public judgment emerging in digital contexts. Arditama, Lestari, and Munandar observe that digital citizens actively judge policies and political behavior through social media, exerting pressure on formal institutions. However, as Taefur and Nuriyatman note, such public judgment often precedes—or even replaces—formal legal judgment, generating tension between public opinion and institutional justice (Taefur & Nuriyatman, 2024).

Thus, Arendt's two models of judgment—the actor and the spectator—remain highly relevant for understanding contemporary political dynamics, particularly in relation to the phenomenon of "No Viral No Justice" in Indonesia. The actor model emphasizes judgment as a deliberative and participatory practice within the public realm, while the spectator model highlights moral and imaginative reflection made possible through distance. The central challenge of the digital age, as underscored by Longo (2025) and Daus (2024), is how to preserve spaces for impartial judgment amid algorithmic mediation and the pressures of virality. In this sense, judgment remains, for Arendt, the most profoundly human political faculty—a way of thinking together in an increasingly fragmented world.

## **No Viral No Justice' in an Arendtian Perspective: Digital Public Space and Legal Legitimacy**

Hannah Arendt's reflections on action, the public realm, and power provide a sharp theoretical framework for understanding a contemporary socio-political phenomenon in Indonesia known as *No Viral No Justice* (NVNJ). This phenomenon describes a condition in which legal attention and enforcement toward a case only materialize after the issue goes viral on social media (Nanindya & Subarsyah, 2024). In *The Human Condition* and *On Violence*, Arendt emphasizes that genuine politics can occur only within the *space of appearance*—a realm where human beings appear before one another through speech and action (Werang, 2025; Cian Ibnu Sina et al., 2024). Within this space, individuals disclose themselves as political beings and constitute a common world through action that is plural, spontaneous, and inherently unpredictable (Koten, 2023a).

For Arendt, action signifies far more than instrumental behavior. It is a manifestation of *natality*, the distinctly human capacity to begin something new. Action acquires meaning only when performed in conditions of plurality—before others who witness, judge, and remember it (Werang, 2025). In the digital context, social media appears to offer a new form of space of appearance, where individuals speak and act before a broad audience. Yet, as Rianto (2023) argues in his analysis of *sousveillance* and new forms of citizen monitoring, this digital space is fragile and fragmented, governed more by algorithms and visibility than by deliberation and mutual recognition (Novelli & Sandri, 2024). Thus, while social media opens new avenues for political participation, it often fails to realize the deliberative ethos of the public realm envisioned by Arendt.

The NVNJ phenomenon reflects a new mode of public action structured by the logic of virality. In many Indonesian cases, law enforcement agencies respond seriously only after an issue attracts massive attention online (Runturambi, Aswindo, & Meiyani, 2024; Werek et al., 2024). This pattern signals a shift in legitimacy: justice no longer emerges from established legal procedures but from digitally produced moral pressure (Arditama, Lestari, & Munandar, 2024). Gussela et al. (2024) note that online

visibility has become a measure of legal urgency, effectively displacing formal legal principles as the foundation of justice.

From an Arendtian perspective, this shift indicates a movement from *power* toward *violence*. For Arendt, power arises from collective agreement and sustained action in concert, whereas violence appears when power loses its legitimacy (Arendt, 1958). Viral pressure can thus be understood as a form of symbolic violence that compels the state to act—not through deliberation or shared judgment, but through fear of public outrage. As Fitriani (2025) observes, legal responses to viral cases are often reactive and temporary, lacking systemic reform of law enforcement institutions. Viral authority, therefore, produces a fleeting form of power grounded in public emotion rather than rational legitimacy.

Arendt also warns against the danger of blurring the distinction between fact and opinion. In healthy politics, opinions are formed on the basis of verifiable factual truth. In digital spaces, however, narratives often circulate without verification, generating emotionally charged and biased public opinion (Hanuring Ayu, 2025; Wisanjaya & Widodo, 2024). The phenomenon of *trial by social media* demonstrates how individuals may be publicly condemned before legal facts are properly examined. From Arendt's standpoint, this represents an anti-political condition, replacing shared rational judgment with uncontrolled mass pressure.

Viral action also intensifies what Arendt identifies as the *irreversibility* of action. Once an action enters the public realm, it cannot be undone. In digital society, this condition becomes more extreme, as digital traces are difficult to erase. Practices such as cancel culture and doxing render forgiveness nearly impossible, while political promises are quickly displaced by new viral controversies. Yet for Arendt, *forgiveness* and *promise* are essential political faculties that enable public life to continue after social or political injury (Keladu, 2023; Werang, 2025). Without them, society risks becoming trapped in cycles of resentment and losing its capacity to build a shared future.

Nevertheless, virality is not entirely destructive. In contexts where legal institutions are weak, it may function as a political

catalyst that stimulates public participation and accountability (Ramdani, 2024). Grecya and Yahya (2022) show that NVNJ can also foster civic awareness and collective engagement in demanding justice. In this sense, virality may open a space of appearance when formal institutions fail. Arendt herself acknowledges that authentic political action often begins with the courage to initiate something new, and social media may provide a space for such beginnings (Novelli & Sandri, 2024).

Arendt would insist, however, that digital space becomes genuinely political only when it is connected to sustained deliberative and institutional processes. Rohan Pratama et al. (2024) argue that reliance on virality deepens the crisis of legal legitimacy, as citizens increasingly believe that justice can be achieved only by making their cases go viral. The central challenge for Indonesian democracy, therefore, is not to reject virality, but to integrate it into transparent and just deliberative mechanisms.

In this regard, Arendt's thought offers crucial normative guidance. First, deliberative public spaces—both offline and online—must be restored and expanded to connect viral expression with collective verification and discussion. Second, independent fact-checking institutions should be strengthened to prevent digital opinion from being dominated by disinformation (Wisanjaya, 2024). Third, public literacy in *representative thinking*—the capacity to imagine the perspectives of others—must be cultivated to counter digital hysteria (Kasmawati, 2023). Fourth, mechanisms of forgiveness and reconciliation grounded in restorative justice are needed to heal social wounds exacerbated by excessive virality. Finally, legal systems must balance the protection of free expression and individual rights with ethical responsibility in the use of social media (Arditama, 2024).

In conclusion, Hannah Arendt's political philosophy is not only relevant for explaining the *No Viral No Justice* phenomenon but also offers ethical principles for reconfiguring the relationship between digital publics and legal institutions. From an Arendtian perspective, virality may function as a new form of political action, but it acquires democratic value only when embedded in a rational, deliberative public realm that respects human plurality.

## Conclusion

The “No Viral No Justice” phenomenon in Indonesia’s democratic context reveals a profound paradox between the ideal of justice and digital political practices trapped in the logic of spectacle. Drawing on Hannah Arendt’s political philosophy, this analysis shows that social media virality has displaced the essence of political action (*action*) with symbolic performance aimed primarily at capturing public attention. The public realm, which should function as a space of togetherness, dialogue, and rational judgment, is increasingly reduced to a space of spectacle, where power is supplanted by symbolic violence and justice becomes an algorithmic commodity.

From an Arendtian perspective, this condition represents a fundamental crisis of *power* and *vita activa* in digital society. As legal institutions lose legitimacy and fail to sustain deliberative functions, citizens turn to “viral tribunals,” where justice is determined not by law but by emotionally driven collective opinion. This shift signals not genuine participation but the erosion of *acting in concert*, the core of authentic politics for Arendt. What remains is mass reactivity shaped by algorithms and the attention economy, weakening public trust and accelerating the decline of deliberative democracy. When politics is staged as performance, plurality—the heart of public life for Arendt—degenerates into polarization, dialogue is replaced by hysteria, and action is reduced to representation. Consequently, “No Viral No Justice” marks not merely a social phenomenon but an ontological collapse of the public realm itself—from a space of truth-disclosure into a stage of symbolic competition.

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