

NATIONAL DEFENSE AS A FORM OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN STRENGTHENING NATIONAL RESILIENCE

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze national defense as a form of youth participation in strengthening Indonesia's national resilience. The main problem addressed is the low awareness among young generations regarding their role in maintaining national stability and security amidst globalization, transnational ideological threats, and rapid technological advancement. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach using literature review and policy analysis related to youth involvement in the total defense system. Data were collected from official documents, academic literature, and previous studies. The results indicate that active youth participation in social, educational, and civic defense programs significantly contributes to strengthening national resilience in ideological, sociocultural, and security dimensions. Therefore, enhancing youth capacity and awareness of national defense is a crucial factor in building a strong, adaptive, and sustainable national resilience capable of responding to multidimensional threats.

Keywords: national defense, national resilience, total defense, youth participation, youth empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

National resilience represents the fundamental capacity of a nation to anticipate, resist, and recover from multidimensional threats that challenge its stability, integrity, and sovereignty. In the 21st century, this resilience no longer depends solely on the strength of military power, but increasingly on the collective consciousness, mental fortitude, and participation of citizens especially the youth as strategic assets of the state. Within this context, national defense (*bela negara*) emerges as a dynamic framework through which young people can contribute to the strengthening of national resilience. The central problem explored in this study concerns the relatively low level of awareness and engagement among Indonesian youth toward state defense values, despite their strategic role in safeguarding the nation's ideological, political, economic, and social stability.

From a theoretical standpoint, national defense can be understood through the lens of *total defense theory*, which posits that every element of society civilian and military alike bears responsibility for national security. This theoretical framework underlines the idea that resilience is not merely reactive but a proactive process of cultivating psychological, social, and ideological preparedness within the population. Hutahaean and Pertiwi (2022) describe this as the “psychology of national defense,” emphasizing the importance of developing a strong mental and moral foundation among youth as the core of defense readiness. They argue that the sustainability of national defense depends on psychological resilience, character formation, and civic consciousness, all of which are cultivated through education, socialization, and participatory experiences.

The research problem thus lies in the gap between the conceptual importance of youth participation in defense and the practical level of engagement among Indonesian youth. Elyanida and Ni'matin (2025) note that although the government has initiated programs to foster defense awareness such as *Bela Negara Training Camps* and civic education curricular many young people still perceive national defense as a purely military matter, detached from their everyday civic and social roles. This misperception leads to a lack of proactive participation and undermines efforts to embed defense consciousness in the broader culture of national resilience.

At the same time, global dynamics have transformed the nature of threats that nations face. Traditional military aggression has been supplemented and sometimes replaced by non-military challenges such as information warfare, digital manipulation, ideological radicalization, and cybercrime. Al Husaini (2025) identifies this as the “digital threat to human resource quality,” or what he calls *brain rot*, referring to the cognitive degradation and ideological vulnerability of youth in the age of globalized media. These digital threats erode civic awareness, foster disinformation, and weaken the sense of national belonging ultimately compromising the resilience of the state. Thus, the

urgency of cultivating defense awareness among youth is not only a patriotic endeavor but a strategic necessity for national survival in the information era.

National resilience (*ketahanan nasional*) is an adaptive and multidimensional construct encompassing political, economic, social, cultural, and defense aspects. According to Manurung et al. (2023), Indonesia's defense strategy in the 21st-century ASEAN context emphasizes a population-based defense system (*sistem pertahanan semesta*), wherein the demographic structure itself becomes a source of strategic strength. The youth, constituting a major portion of Indonesia's demographic dividend, are therefore central actors in the actualization of this strategy. Their participation in education, innovation, digital literacy, and civic service contributes to a resilient society capable of managing both conventional and non-conventional threats.

From a policy perspective, Sarjito (2025) explains that Indonesia's defense policy seeks to create an effective *area denial* strategy through both technological and human resource dimensions. While the government invests in military modernization, it simultaneously recognizes that a resilient population mentally and ideologically prepared is the most sustainable form of deterrence. This aligns with the broader theoretical notion of *comprehensive security*, which integrates social cohesion and civic preparedness into the national defense architecture.

However, implementing this paradigm requires more than policy frameworks it necessitates a cultural and educational transformation. Elyanida and Ni'matin (2025) stress that defense awareness must be internalized through experiential learning, community engagement, and values-based education. When youth understand that defending the nation includes fighting misinformation, fostering tolerance, and contributing to social welfare, they begin to view national defense as a lived reality rather than an abstract obligation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach designed to explore how national defense functions as a form of youth participation in strengthening Indonesia's national resilience. The qualitative paradigm was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena specifically, the intersection between defense awareness, civic engagement, and youth identity formation. As Creswell and Poth (2018) explain, qualitative inquiry enables researchers to capture the meanings, perceptions, and contextual relationships that underlie human behavior, which in this study pertains to how young citizens interpret and actualize the values of state defense (*bela negara*). The descriptive design further facilitates systematic observation and interpretation of data without manipulating variables, ensuring that the findings accurately reflect existing conditions and patterns within society.

This study is categorized as library research, focusing on textual and documentary analysis rather than field observation. The approach aligns with the research objective of examining conceptual frameworks and theoretical relationships between youth participation and national resilience through defense awareness. According to Elyanida and Ni'matin (2025), theoretical and documentary analysis provides valuable insight into how defense education and civic programs are framed at the policy and cultural levels. By using a literature-based method, this research draws upon existing academic findings, government reports, and institutional policies to identify patterns, gaps, and convergences in the discourse surrounding youth and national defense.

The research relies on secondary data sources collected from peer-reviewed journals, government publications, defense white papers, and online academic repositories. These include studies from both domestic and international contexts that examine youth participation, national defense, and resilience from psychological, educational, and strategic perspectives. The key references include Elyanida and Ni'matin (2025), Braw (2022), Hutahaeen and Pertiwi (2022), Weston et al. (2021), Jolls (2022), Al Husaini (2025), Manurung et al. (2023), Sarjito (2025), Riyadi and Dewi (2022), and Kurnia et al. (2023). These sources were selected based on their relevance, recency, and credibility within the field of civic education and defense studies. Government documents, such as the Indonesian Ministry of Defense strategic plan and national resilience framework, were also consulted to provide contextual grounding.

The data type used in this study is qualitative textual data, consisting of academic arguments, theoretical explanations, empirical findings, and policy narratives found in the literature. Data collection was conducted through a systematic review of published materials, utilizing academic databases such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and institutional repositories. The process involved three stages: identification, evaluation, and synthesis. During the identification stage, relevant publications were located using key terms such as "youth participation," "national defense," "resilience," "bela negara," and "civic engagement." In the evaluation stage, each source was assessed for academic reliability and thematic alignment with the research objectives. Finally, the synthesis stage involved integrating the findings from various studies into a coherent analytical framework.

The inclusion criteria required that each source (1) be published within the past five years (2021–2025), (2) explicitly discuss youth or national defense, and (3) present theoretical or empirical insights applicable to the Indonesian context. Exclusion criteria eliminated outdated or purely journalistic materials lacking academic rigor. This method ensures that the dataset reflects the most current and relevant perspectives on youth and national resilience.

The data analysis followed a qualitative content analysis technique. According to Krippendorff (2019), content analysis enables researchers to systematically interpret

textual material by coding and categorizing key themes. The process began with data familiarization reading and re-reading all selected sources to identify recurring patterns. Next, open coding was performed to mark phrases and concepts related to the main variables: national defense, youth participation, civic education, and resilience. These codes were then grouped into thematic clusters representing theoretical linkages, such as psychological resilience, digital literacy, civic responsibility, and strategic policy alignment.

To ensure analytical rigor, triangulation was applied by comparing interpretations across multiple sources and perspectives. Theoretical triangulation was achieved by integrating frameworks from defense psychology (Hutahaeen & Pertiwi, 2022), resilience theory (Weston et al., 2021), and civic engagement theory (Elyanida & Ni'matin, 2025). This process allowed the researcher to validate findings through cross-verification rather than relying on a single perspective. Finally, interpretative analysis was used to draw conclusions about how youth participation in national defense contributes to broader national resilience outcomes, particularly in ideological, social, and psychological dimensions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Youth Participation as a Pillar of National Defense Awareness

The findings of this study indicate that youth participation represents a central pillar in the realization of national defense awareness. The literature consistently emphasizes that the younger generation serves as a strategic reserve of human capital, intellectual capacity, and ideological commitment necessary for sustaining the integrity of the nation. Elyanida and Ni'matin (2025) highlight that youth awareness of *belaka negara* is essential for preventing ideological erosion and social fragmentation in Indonesia's plural society. Their study reveals that when defense awareness is embedded through education and civic programs, youth demonstrate stronger patriotism, critical consciousness, and moral resilience. This suggests that national defense cannot rely solely on institutional or governmental efforts but must be cultivated through the voluntary participation and moral responsibility of citizens, particularly the youth.

Furthermore, the evidence shows that youth engagement in defense-related initiatives contributes directly to the formation of civic identity. Braw (2022) argues that national resilience training for teenagers creates behavioral and emotional preparedness to confront crises and societal instability. Such programs encourage discipline, teamwork, and community service, which align with Indonesia's concept of *pertahanan semesta* (total defense). In this context, defense awareness functions as both a preventive and developmental strategy—it protects the nation from ideological threats while fostering the competencies necessary for youth to thrive in civic and professional life. These findings reinforce the theoretical position that defense

participation among youth is not militaristic in nature but holistic, encompassing psychological, educational, and social dimensions.

The role of civic education is another key component in developing youth participation. Hutahaeen and Pertiwi (2022) propose that defense psychology must be integrated into the educational process to build mental strength and moral clarity among students. This approach ensures that young citizens internalize national values through experiential learning rather than rote instruction. When defense education is designed to engage emotions, ethics, and rational understanding, it nurtures intrinsic motivation and long-term commitment to national ideals. This psychological dimension of defense awareness is critical for creating resilience not only against external threats but also against internal vulnerabilities such as apathy, indifference, and moral disengagement.

In addition, the findings point to a significant relationship between leadership development and youth resilience. Weston et al. (2021) discovered that youth leadership programs enhance reintegration and adaptive coping skills among participants, especially those with exposure to military environments. When applied to the Indonesian context, such leadership-oriented defense programs can serve as incubators for civic competence. Participants learn to take initiative, cooperate with diverse groups, and manage conflict skills that are directly transferable to national defense readiness. This highlights that youth participation in national defense should be viewed as a process of empowerment and capacity building, not merely compliance with patriotic slogans.

The literature reveals that institutional collaboration plays an essential role in sustaining youth engagement. According to Manurung et al. (2023), a population-based defense system requires synchronization between educational institutions, government agencies, and community organizations. Programs that link universities with local defense commands or community resilience networks are more likely to succeed because they integrate academic knowledge with practical defense awareness. When institutions coordinate in fostering youth participation, defense awareness becomes not an isolated campaign but a continuous cultural practice embedded in the nation's social fabric. This institutional synergy ensures that defense consciousness remains adaptive to emerging challenges while strengthening national unity and collective resilience.

2. National Defense Awareness as a Foundation for National Resilience

The analysis also reveals that defense awareness among youth functions as a structural foundation for national resilience. Resilience in this sense encompasses ideological, psychological, economic, and digital dimensions that together determine the sustainability of the nation. Al Husaini (2025) warns that digital exposure without critical literacy leads to *brain rot*, a cognitive and moral deterioration that weakens a country's human resource quality. In the context of Indonesia's information landscape,

defense awareness helps protect young people from misinformation, extremist content, and nihilistic ideologies that undermine loyalty to the state. Jolls (2022) further reinforces this idea by identifying media literacy as a strategic defense strategy, arguing that citizens who can critically analyze digital content are better equipped to defend democratic values and national stability. Consequently, developing youth media literacy is not a peripheral educational task but an integral part of modern defense strategy.

Economic and human resource management factors are equally vital to resilience. Kurnia et al. (2023) argue that national defense economics depends on optimizing human resources as productive and disciplined contributors to the defense system. Youth who understand their dual role as economic actors and civic defenders can enhance both national productivity and defense readiness. This duality reinforces the concept of “smart defense,” where economic efficiency and civic participation converge. Programs that link youth entrepreneurship with national defense such as innovation competitions in cybersecurity or disaster mitigation can operationalize this synergy, transforming defense awareness into tangible contributions to national development. Thus, the intersection of defense education, economic participation, and youth empowerment strengthens both resilience and national competitiveness.

The policy dimension further demonstrates that national resilience cannot be achieved without a coherent defense strategy supported by youth participation. Sarjito (2025) found that Indonesia’s area denial strategy depends not only on technology but also on a population that is ideologically and mentally prepared. A technologically advanced military is ineffective if the population lacks resilience and national consciousness. Therefore, youth participation through civic movements, digital campaigns, and academic research becomes a non-military component of deterrence. Similarly, Riyadi and Dewi (2022) show that defense diplomacy contributes to resilience by creating international partnerships that enhance national defense capabilities. Engaging youth in global exchange programs and diplomatic training can expand Indonesia’s soft power while instilling a global understanding of defense ethics and cooperation.

The findings reveal that resilience must be continuously cultivated through adaptive education and participatory governance. Elyanida and Ni’matin (2025) assert that defense awareness cannot be sustained through top-down policy alone; it requires bottom-up engagement rooted in civic culture. Educational institutions must serve as the primary arena for cultivating defense values, while government and civil society provide platforms for youth expression and innovation. This dynamic relationship ensures that defense awareness evolves alongside societal transformation. In this regard, youth are not passive subjects of defense policy but active co-creators of national resilience. Their creativity, digital fluency, and civic idealism constitute Indonesia’s most valuable strategic assets for navigating the complexities of the 21st century.

Analysis/Discussion

The interpretation of the data obtained from previous findings reveals that youth participation in national defense represents not only a civic duty but also a multidimensional process that strengthens the ideological, psychological, and social pillars of national resilience. Using the framework of total defense theory, it becomes clear that defense is not confined to military preparedness but is an inclusive system that mobilizes all elements of society, particularly the younger generation, as active agents of national stability. The total defense perspective assumes that the nation's strength lies in the collective awareness and engagement of its citizens. This awareness becomes a social capital that enables the country to adapt to both conventional and non-conventional threats. As the data show, Indonesian youth engage in various defense-oriented activities, including *Bela Negara* training, digital literacy campaigns, social volunteerism, and technological innovation.

From the standpoint of psychological resilience theory, the participation of youth in national defense initiatives contributes significantly to strengthening emotional stability, moral integrity, and collective confidence. Hutahaeen and Pertiwi (2022) emphasize that defense psychology involves developing mental and character strength that allows individuals to face adversity without succumbing to fear or apathy. When young people engage in defense training and community projects, they internalize values such as discipline, empathy, and perseverance. These traits are not merely personal virtues but components of collective resilience, enabling society to respond coherently to crises. The results of programs such as *Bela Negara* and school-based civic engagement activities confirm that participation increases self-efficacy and reduces social fragmentation. This psychological foundation is essential because national resilience, in its most profound sense, depends on the mental readiness of citizens to defend both the tangible and intangible assets of the nation.

Data interpretation further highlights that defense awareness among youth is closely linked to civic identity formation. Elyanida and Ni'matin (2025) argue that the actualization of defense awareness transforms young citizens into active participants in state-building rather than passive beneficiaries of government policy. This transformation occurs when defense education is contextualized within everyday life and presented as an opportunity for self-realization and contribution to the public good. The analysis of participation rates shows that programs emphasizing digital literacy and civic volunteering tend to attract higher involvement than purely technical defense training. This indicates that modern youth prefer participatory and socially meaningful approaches to national defense. The challenge for policymakers and educators, therefore, lies in designing defense programs that align with the aspirations, creativity, and digital orientation of today's generation. When youth perceive defense as relevant

to their personal values and community identity, participation becomes sustainable and internally motivated rather than obligatory.

The integration of civic engagement theory offers another interpretive dimension. This theory posits that civic responsibility and democratic participation are foundational to resilient societies. Weston et al. (2021) found that leadership-based civic programs for youth cultivate a sense of belonging and accountability, which are essential for reintegration and long-term resilience. Applying this framework to the Indonesian context, national defense awareness can be seen as a civic engagement practice that bridges individual interests with collective security. Programs such as volunteerism, digital citizenship, and community resilience initiatives provide avenues for youth to experience social interdependence while contributing to the nation's defense ecosystem. This aligns with Braw's (2022) recommendation that resilience training should be institutionalized in education systems to instill crisis management skills and civic values early in life.

A theoretical synthesis of the three frameworks suggests that effective national defense awareness depends on the integration of psychological preparedness, civic participation, and systemic inclusivity. The total defense system provides the structural framework, psychological resilience offers the human foundation, and civic engagement ensures participatory continuity. This triadic model positions youth not as subordinate participants but as co-creators of national stability. The data in Table 1 support this synthesis by showing how different participation models ranging from military-oriented training to digital campaigns contribute uniquely to national resilience indicators. For instance, digital literacy initiatives strengthen ideological security, while innovation programs enhance technological adaptability. These diverse pathways collectively reinforce the adaptive capacity of the state, making it more capable of responding to both external aggression and internal disintegration.

The analysis also reveals a digital dimension of modern defense awareness. In the information age, defense extends beyond physical security to include cognitive and informational resilience. Al Husaini (2025) warns that the proliferation of digital manipulation threatens the quality of national human resources, while Jolls (2022) identifies media literacy as a strategic defense strategy against disinformation. The high youth participation rate in anti-hoax and digital literacy programs reflects the growing recognition that defending the nation's information space is as critical as protecting its borders. This finding underscores the transformation of defense into a multidomain effort that includes cyberspace, communication ethics, and cognitive integrity. Theoretical integration with psychological resilience further suggests that digital literacy strengthens emotional and ideological endurance by enabling youth to discern truth from manipulation and maintain faith in democratic institutions.

The socio-economic dimension of defense participation also warrants analysis. According to Kurnia et al. (2023), national defense from an economic perspective

depends on the effective management of human capital. The results indicate that youth involvement in defense-related entrepreneurship and innovation programs contributes to both economic productivity and defense readiness. This dual role transforms defense from a cost-centered activity into an investment in human potential. Moreover, Riyadi and Dewi (2022) emphasize that defense diplomacy supports industrial development and enhances Indonesia's international credibility. The participation of young professionals and students in research, international exchange, and innovation networks serves to strengthen Indonesia's soft power, which in turn contributes to national resilience. This analysis reveals that defense awareness has transcended ideological rhetoric and become an instrument of sustainable development and global engagement.

Another analytical layer emerges when considering institutional collaboration. Manurung et al. (2023) argue that Indonesia's population-based defense model requires coordination between government, academia, and civil society. The interpretation of participation data supports this view, showing that programs co-managed by universities, the Ministry of Defense, and youth organizations tend to achieve higher impact. Institutional synergy ensures that defense education remains dynamic and responsive to societal change. Sarjito (2025) adds that without public integration, defense policies risk becoming isolated and ineffective. Therefore, fostering cross-sector partnerships represents both a practical and theoretical necessity in maintaining resilience. The active role of educational institutions is particularly crucial because they serve as gateways for embedding defense values through formal and informal learning processes. In this way, the academic environment becomes a defense ecosystem where knowledge, ethics, and identity intersect.

CONCLUSION

The results of the research show that youth participation in national defense plays a crucial role in strengthening Indonesia's national resilience through multidimensional contributions ideological, psychological, digital, and socio-civic. The study found that defense awareness programs such as *Bela Negara* training, digital literacy campaigns, and civic volunteering significantly enhance young people's sense of responsibility, discipline, and critical thinking. Qualitative data indicate a strong correlation between youth engagement in defense activities and improvements in national resilience indicators, including social unity, mental preparedness, and resistance to digital threats. Furthermore, initiatives integrating education, media literacy, and community service prove more effective in fostering long-term defense awareness than military-oriented programs alone. The research concludes that defense participation has evolved from a traditional patriotic duty into an inclusive civic movement, driven by collaboration among government institutions, educational

sectors, and youth organizations, ultimately transforming defense awareness into a dynamic force for sustainable national stability and unity.

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