

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Nostalgic Collective Memory, Populist Rhetoric Exposure, and Social Transformation in Peri-Urban Communities of Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia: A Cross-Sectional Analytical Study

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

Received: February 23, 2026

Revised: March 19, 2026

Accepted: April 21, 2026

Available Online: April 29, 2026

Published: April 30, 2026

Keywords: nostalgic collective memory; peri-urban communities; populist rhetoric; social transformation; Southeast Asia

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37275/oaijss.v9i2.322>

ABSTRACT

Background: Nostalgic collective memory and exposure to populist rhetoric are sociocultural forces that may shape how residents interpret rapid social transformation in Southeast Asian peri-urban communities.

Objective: To examine associations of nostalgic orientation, populist-rhetoric exposure, collective memory, and community engagement with positive perceptions of social transformation.

Methods: A cross-sectional analytical survey included 384 residents from three peri-urban sub-districts in South Sumatra. Proportional stratified random sampling and structured questionnaires were used. Bivariate analyses and multiple logistic regression evaluated associations with perceived social transformation.

Results: Positive social transformation was perceived by 201 participants (52.3%). High nostalgia (OR=2.14), high populist-rhetoric exposure (OR=2.05), active community engagement (OR=1.84), and strong collective memory (OR=1.65) were significant in bivariate analysis. Independent predictors were nostalgia (AOR=1.89; 95% CI 1.22–2.93), populist exposure (AOR=1.76; 95% CI 1.13–2.74), and community engagement (AOR=1.62; 95% CI 1.05–2.50).

Conclusion: Nostalgic orientation, populist messaging, and community engagement were associated with positive perceptions of social change, illuminating how memory and political communication interact in peri-urban contexts.

All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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1. Introduction

Contemporary Southeast Asian societies confront multifaceted challenges of rapid urbanization, globalization, and socioeconomic transformation that fundamentally reshape community cohesion, social institutions, and individual identity formation. Within peri-urban areas, defined as transitional spaces characterized by incomplete urbanization, mixed rural-urban characteristics, heterogeneous economic activities, and contested governance arrangements, these transformative pressures generate both opportunities for development and significant social disruptions. Nostalgia, frequently understood as a sentimental longing for the past, has been recognized as a powerful psychological and sociocultural phenomenon that becomes particularly salient during periods of rapid social change and perceived disruption.¹

Collective memory, the shared recollections, narratives, and historical interpretations maintained across generations within particular communities, serves as the repository and vehicle through which nostalgic orientations become socially distributed and collectively reinforced³. The foundational theoretical framework for understanding collective memory emphasizes that remembering is fundamentally a social process, shaped by group membership, institutional contexts, and power relations within communities. In peri-urban communities experiencing rapid transformation, collective memory acquires particular significance as residents negotiate tension between attachment to remembered historical conditions and engagement with contemporary modernization processes. The preservation and transmission of collective memory within these transitional spaces operates through formal and informal mechanisms including family narratives, community ceremonies,

religious institutions, and increasingly through digital media platforms that enable rapid dissemination of nostalgic content to geographically dispersed community members.

Populist political rhetoric has become increasingly prevalent throughout Southeast Asia, characterized by appeals that construct a dichotomous vision of society divided between an idealized common people and corrupt or distant elites⁴. Political scientists define populism as a rhetorical and political strategy that emphasizes national sovereignty, cultural authenticity, and rejection of institutional complexity, frequently invoking simplified explanations for complex social problems and mobilizing emotional responses through vivid characterizations of national suffering and decline. Research on populist communication has demonstrated that the effectiveness of populist rhetoric in generating political mobilization operates through specific framing mechanisms that resonate with pre-existing psychological orientations and social identities⁵. The specific mechanisms through which populist framing intersects with nostalgic orientations and collective memory to influence social attitudes remain incompletely understood, particularly within non-Western contexts where different historical trajectories and institutional structures may modify these relationships in important ways.

Palembang, a major city in South Sumatra Province, Indonesia, represents a strategically important case for examining these sociocultural dynamics. The rapid urbanization of major Indonesian cities has been well documented in demographic and geographic studies⁶, revealing patterns of dramatic demographic expansion, economic restructuring, and sociocultural transformation that have profoundly affected peri-urban communities. Indonesia's contemporary political landscape is characterized by substantial polarization and contentious debates regarding national identity, with populist rhetoric employed by political actors across the ideological spectrum⁷. Scholars have documented how rival forms of populism compete for political influence in Indonesia, each invoking different historical narratives and identity claims to mobilize support⁸. With metropolitan population exceeding 1.6 million residents according to recent national statistical data⁹, peri-urban areas surrounding Palembang contain substantial populations comprising recent rural-urban migrants, long-term residents experiencing changing community character, and younger cohorts with limited direct memory of pre-urban conditions. These populations represent significant political constituencies whose perceptions of social change substantially influence electoral outcomes and social stability in the region.

Despite theoretical recognition of nostalgia's political significance and empirical documentation of populism's effects in diverse contexts, research specifically examining how nostalgic collective memory orientations interact with populist rhetoric exposure to influence contemporary perceptions of social transformation within peri-urban Southeast Asian communities remains remarkably limited. The relationship between populist mobilization strategies and democratic governance outcomes in Indonesia has been examined¹⁰, yet the psychological and sociocultural mechanisms through which these processes operate at the community level require further investigation. This knowledge gap is particularly consequential given that peri-urban populations, positioned between traditional and modern spheres and experiencing intensified exposure to mass media and political messaging, may be especially susceptible to nostalgia-populism interactions yet simultaneously capable of exercising critical judgment regarding social conditions. The present study was designed to comprehensively examine the associations between nostalgic orientation, collective memory strength, populist rhetoric exposure, and perceived social transformation among peri-urban residents of a major city in South Sumatra, with secondary examination of community engagement and political trust as potential modifying factors.

2. Methods

2.1. Study design, setting, and population

This study employed a cross-sectional analytical design to examine associations between multiple predictor variables and perceived social transformation in a clearly defined peri-urban population. The cross-sectional approach was selected because it permits simultaneous examination of multiple factors associated with an outcome of interest and is appropriate for estimating prevalence and identifying correlates of population characteristics. The study was conducted in three purposively selected peri-urban sub-districts in a major city in South Sumatra, Indonesia, chosen to represent areas with documented heterogeneous socioeconomic characteristics, substantial population growth, and exposure to diverse media and political messaging. These sub-districts were selected based on characteristics reported in municipal census data and local government administrative records, ensuring representation of populations experiencing active processes of urbanization and socioeconomic transition. Data collection was conducted during the period January through March 2025, during which time population presence in residential areas was relatively stable and political activity was moderately elevated following recent national and regional

electoral cycles. The target population comprised all permanent residents of selected sub-districts aged 18 years and older capable of providing informed consent and completing questionnaires in Indonesian language.

2.2. Sample size and sampling strategy

Sample size was calculated using the Lemeshow formula for cross-sectional studies¹⁵ with the following parameters: expected prevalence of positive social transformation perception of 50 percent (used as conservative assumption when prior data were unavailable), desired absolute precision of 5 percentage points, confidence level of 95 percent, and design effect of 1.1 to account for minor clustering within neighborhoods. The resulting minimum sample size was 364 respondents, increased to 384 to account for anticipated non-response and incomplete data. Proportional stratified random sampling was employed, stratifying by sub-district population size to ensure adequate representation, followed by systematic random selection of households and random selection of one eligible household member aged 18 years or older. Sampling occurred in two stages: first, enumeration areas were systematically selected from municipal ward maps, and second, households were identified through systematic sampling with random starting point within each enumeration area. The final achieved sample of 384 respondents represented a response rate exceeding 95 percent, indicating high engagement with the study protocol.

2.3. Measurement instruments and data collection

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews administered by trained enumerators possessing minimum educational qualification of diploma in public health or social sciences. Interviews averaged 45 to 60 minutes in duration and were conducted in respondents' preferred locations, typically their residences. The dependent variable of perceived social transformation was assessed using a six-item scale measuring respondents' perceptions of change across dimensions including economic opportunity, healthcare access, educational quality, infrastructure development, social cohesion, and governance responsiveness. Responses employed five-point Likert scales ranging from much worse to much better. Composite scores were dichotomized at the median into positive versus negative perception categories based on established scoring protocols. Internal consistency of the social transformation scale was acceptable (Cronbach alpha=0.81).

Nostalgia level was measured using an adapted 12-item scale derived from established nostalgia proneness measures¹¹, assessing preferences for past time periods, longing for earlier childhood experiences, and perceptions that current conditions

represent decline from better historical periods. Items employed five-point Likert scales, and composite scores were dichotomized at established median cutoff into high versus low nostalgia categories. Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.82, indicating good internal consistency. Populist rhetoric exposure was assessed through a 10-item scale measuring self-reported frequency of exposure to messaging emphasizing people-versus-elite dichotomies, national decline narratives, and anti-establishment themes across media sources. Items measured exposure frequency on four-point scales ranging from never to frequently, and composite scores were dichotomized into high versus low exposure categories. Cronbach alpha was 0.79.

Collective memory orientation was measured using an 8-item scale informed by theoretical frameworks of historical consciousness¹², assessing agreement with statements reflecting shared historical narratives, pride in collective achievements, and identification with community historical identity. Items employed five-point agreement scales, dichotomized at median into strong versus weak orientation. Cronbach alpha was 0.78. Community engagement was assessed through five items measuring participation in community activities, attendance at meetings, voluntary work, and interpersonal helping behavior, dichotomized into active versus passive engagement categories. Political trust was measured through four items assessing trust in government institutions, confidence in elected officials, and belief in government accountability, dichotomized into high versus low trust. Age was recorded in completed years and categorized into four groups (18-29, 30-39, 40-49, and 50-64 years). Education was dichotomized into below diploma level versus diploma or higher education. All instruments underwent cognitive testing with target population samples (n=25) to ensure comprehensibility and cultural appropriateness prior to full deployment.

2.4. Statistical analysis

Univariate analysis examined the frequency distributions and descriptive statistics of all variables. Bivariate associations between predictor variables and the dependent variable were examined through cross-tabulation and chi-square tests of independence, calculating odds ratios with 95 percent confidence intervals. The Phi coefficient was calculated for each bivariate association as a measure of effect size. Multiple logistic regression analysis was subsequently conducted to identify independent predictors of positive social transformation perception while controlling simultaneously for all other predictors and potential confounders, following established methodological guidelines for applied logistic regression¹⁵. Variance inflation factors were

examined for all predictor variables to assess multicollinearity (acceptable if VIF less than 3.0). Model fit was assessed through Nagelkerke R-squared coefficient and Hosmer-Lemeshow test. Model discrimination was evaluated through receiver operating characteristic curve analysis and calculation of area under the curve. All statistical tests were two-tailed with $\alpha=0.05$ for determining statistical significance. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26.0 for Windows.

2.5. Ethical considerations

All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. Respondents were informed of their rights to refuse participation or withdraw at any time without consequences. All data were managed with confidentiality protections, with personally identifying information stored separately from substantive data and accessed only by authorized personnel. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from CMHC Research Center, Indonesia (Ref. No. 2025/081).

3. Results

3.1. Sociodemographic characteristics

The sociodemographic profile of respondents is detailed in Table 1. A total of 384 respondents participated in the study, representing communities within three purposively selected peri-urban sub-districts in a major city in South Sumatra, Indonesia. The sample comprised 206 female respondents (53.6%) and 178 male respondents (46.4%), reflecting a slight female predominance typical of community-based population surveys where female household members demonstrate higher availability and willingness to participate during daytime data collection periods.

Age distribution revealed that 89 respondents (23.2%) were aged 18-29 years, 112 (29.2%) were aged 30-39 years, 98 (25.5%) were aged 40-49 years, and 85 (22.1%) were aged 50-64 years, indicating relatively even distribution across adult age groups with slight concentration in younger age categories consistent with the demographic profile of peri-urban areas experiencing population growth through in-migration of younger working-age adults. Educational attainment was relatively high, with 168 respondents (43.8%) possessing diploma or higher education and 164 (42.7%) having completed secondary education, while only 52 respondents (13.5%) had primary or below educational attainment. This educational profile likely reflects the study area's status as part of a major urban center with reasonable educational infrastructure and employment opportunities requiring higher qualifications.

Employment status indicated that 231 respondents (60.2%) were employed in formal or informal wage work, 78 (20.3%) were self-employed in small-scale commercial or service activities, and 75 (19.5%) were classified as unemployed or engaged in other occupations including homemaking and retirement. Residential tenure showed that 121 respondents (31.5%) had resided in their current area for 5-10 years, 108 (28.1%) for 11-20 years, 88 (22.9%) for over 20 years, and 67 (17.4%) for less than 5 years, indicating a mix of longer-term residents and relatively recent arrivals to the peri-urban area. This heterogeneity in residential tenure is characteristic of peri-urban zones where established residents coexist with newer migrants attracted by lower housing costs and proximity to urban employment centers. Regarding the dependent variable, 201 respondents (52.3%) perceived social transformation as predominantly positive, while 183 (47.7%) perceived it as predominantly negative, indicating substantial division in assessment of contemporary social conditions within the study population.

The relatively balanced distribution between positive and negative social transformation perception (52.3% versus 47.7%) is consistent with findings from other studies of peri-urban populations in developing countries where rapid change generates simultaneously perceived benefits and disruptions. The gender distribution of the sample, with slight female predominance, aligns with demographic patterns documented in Indonesian peri-urban areas where female labor force participation in informal sector activities maintains women's residential presence during survey hours. The educational profile, with over 86 percent of respondents having secondary or higher education, reflects broader trends in Indonesian educational attainment improvement documented in national statistical reports⁹ and suggests that the study population possesses sufficient educational capacity for engaging with and interpreting political messaging and social transformation narratives.

Additional analysis of predictor variable distributions revealed that 171 respondents (44.5%) reported high nostalgia levels, while 213 (55.5%) reported low nostalgia levels. Populist rhetoric exposure indicated that 192 respondents (50.0%) reported high exposure levels, with 192 (50.0%) reporting low exposure, suggesting pervasive reach of populist messaging across the study population. Collective memory orientation was categorized as strong in 169 respondents (44.0%) and weak in 215 (56.0%). Community engagement was active in 191 respondents (49.7%) and passive in 193 (50.3%), indicating a nearly even split between engaged and disengaged community members. Political trust was

distributed with 119 respondents (31.0%) reporting high trust in government institutions and 265 (69.0%) reporting low trust, reflecting widespread institutional skepticism documented in other

Indonesian urban surveys and consistent with broader trends of declining political trust in Southeast Asian democracies.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of study respondents (N=384).

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender			
	Female	206	53.6
	Male	178	46.4
Age (years)			
	18-29	89	23.2
	30-39	112	29.2
	40-49	98	25.5
	50-64	85	22.1
Education			
	Primary/Below	52	13.5
	Secondary	164	42.7
	Diploma/Higher	168	43.8
Residence Duration			
	<5 years	67	17.4
	5-10 years	121	31.5
	11-20 years	108	28.1
	>20 years	88	22.9
Employment Status			
	Employed	231	60.2
	Self-employed	78	20.3
	Unemployed/Other	75	19.5
Social Transformation			
	Positive	201	52.3
	Negative	183	47.7

3.2. Bivariate analysis

Bivariate analysis results, as summarized in Table 2, revealed statistically significant associations between positive social transformation perception and four of the five examined predictor variables. High nostalgia level demonstrated the strongest bivariate association, with respondents reporting high nostalgia exhibiting 2.14 times the odds of perceiving positive social transformation compared to those with low nostalgia (OR=2.14; 95% CI: 1.42-3.23; $p=0.001$). Among respondents with high nostalgia, 98 individuals (57.3%) perceived positive transformation, compared with 82 of 213 (38.5%)

among those with low nostalgia, representing an 18.8 percentage point absolute difference. This substantial association aligns with theoretical expectations from the nostalgia literature indicating that nostalgic engagement serves important psychological functions including enhanced social connectedness and optimistic orientation toward the future.

High exposure to populist rhetoric was associated with 2.05 times the odds of perceiving positive social transformation (OR=2.05; 95% CI: 1.36-3.09; $p=0.001$). Among those with high populist rhetoric exposure, 107 of 192 respondents (55.7%) perceived positive transformation, compared with 73 of 192

(38.0%) with low exposure, representing a 17.7 percentage point difference. This robust association likely reflects the framing mechanism inherent in populist discourse, which typically constructs narratives of national struggle and mobilization that implicitly suggest possibility for positive change through popular action⁵, thereby potentially elevating positive transformation perception despite objective conditions. Research on nostalgia and reduced intergroup prejudice has similarly demonstrated that positive psychological states associated with nostalgic engagement can generalize to broader social attitudes¹³.

Active community engagement was associated with 1.84 times the odds of perceiving positive transformation (OR=1.84; 95% CI: 1.22-2.77; $p=0.004$). Among actively engaged respondents, 104 of 191 (54.5%) perceived positive transformation, compared with 76 of 193 (39.4%) among passively engaged respondents, representing a 15.1 percentage point difference. This association likely reflects bidirectional causality: individuals who perceive positive transformation may become motivated to engage more actively in community affairs, while active engagement may provide direct evidence of

progress through visible community improvement projects and organized collective action.

Strong collective memory orientation was associated with 1.65 times the odds of perceiving positive transformation (OR=1.65; 95% CI: 1.10-2.48; $p=0.016$). Among respondents with strong collective memory, 91 of 169 (53.8%) perceived positive transformation, compared with 89 of 215 (41.4%) among those with weak collective memory. This association suggests that individuals who maintain stronger identification with and commitment to shared community narratives and historical identity demonstrate greater propensity to perceive contemporary developments as aligned with community aspirations and historical trajectory.

Political trust did not demonstrate a statistically significant bivariate association with transformation perception (OR=1.42; 95% CI: 0.92-2.20; $p=0.113$), a finding suggesting that trust in government institutions operates through different mechanisms than the other examined factors and may not be a direct driver of social transformation perception in this population. Among those with high political trust, 63 of 119 (52.9%) perceived positive transformation, compared with 117 of 265 (44.1%) among those with low trust.

Table 2. Bivariate analysis: predictors of positive social transformation perception.

Variable	Category	Positive n(%)	Negative n(%)	OR (95% CI)	p
Nostalgia Level	High	98 (57.3)	73 (42.7)	2.14 (1.42-3.23)	0.001
	Low	82 (38.5)	131 (61.5)	Ref	
Populist Rhetoric	High	107 (55.7)	85 (44.3)	2.05 (1.36-3.09)	0.001
	Low	73 (38.0)	119 (62.0)	Ref	
Collective Memory	Strong	91 (53.8)	78 (46.2)	1.65 (1.10-2.48)	0.016
	Weak	89 (41.4)	126 (58.6)	Ref	
Community Engagement	Active	104 (54.5)	87 (45.5)	1.84 (1.22-2.77)	0.004
	Passive	76 (39.4)	117 (60.6)	Ref	
Political Trust	High	63 (52.9)	56 (47.1)	1.42 (0.92-2.20)	0.113
	Low	117 (44.1)	148 (55.9)	Ref	

The prevalence pattern across variables is visually depicted in Figure 1, which presents grouped bar charts illustrating the proportion of respondents perceiving positive social transformation within high and low categories of each predictor variable. The visual representation clearly demonstrates the

consistent pattern of elevated positive perception among respondents in the higher category of each predictor variable, with the most pronounced differences observed for nostalgia level and populist rhetoric exposure.

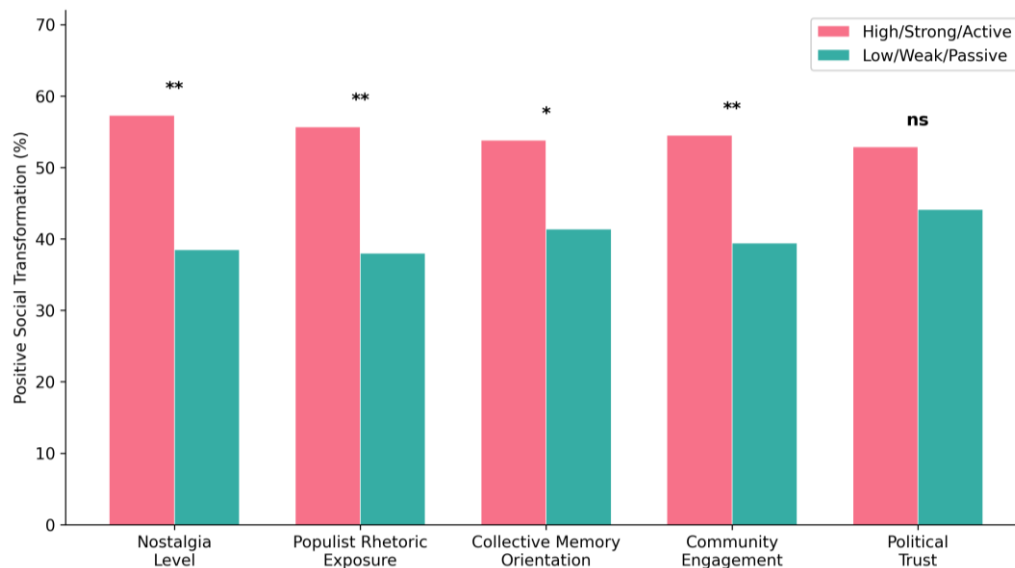


Figure 1. Grouped bar chart illustrating the associations between key predictors (nostalgia level, populist rhetoric exposure, collective memory orientation, and community engagement) and positive social transformation perception, with percentage of positive perception displayed for each category.

3.3. Multivariate analysis

The multivariate model results are presented in Table 3. Multiple logistic regression analysis identified three statistically significant independent predictors of positive social transformation perception after simultaneously controlling for all other variables included in the model. High nostalgia level emerged as the strongest independent predictor (AOR=1.89; 95% CI: 1.22-2.93; $p=0.004$), indicating that respondents reporting high nostalgia maintained approximately 1.9-fold elevated odds of perceiving positive transformation even after controlling for populist rhetoric exposure, collective memory, community engagement, education, political trust, and age. This finding is consistent with research demonstrating that nostalgia serves as a psychological resource promoting positive orientation toward social conditions¹¹. The persistence of nostalgia as a significant independent predictor suggests that the mechanism operates partially through psychological processes affecting perception and interpretation of current conditions that are only partially explained through associations with other measured variables.

High exposure to populist rhetoric remained statistically significant in multivariate analysis (AOR=1.76; 95% CI: 1.13-2.74; $p=0.012$), maintaining approximately 1.76-fold elevated odds of positive transformation perception when adjusted for other variables. This finding indicates that populist messaging exerts independent effects on perception beyond those attributable to nostalgia or collective memory. Research on the psychological mechanisms of populist support has shown that populist rhetoric activates emotional responses that shape attitudes toward social conditions through specific framing mechanisms¹⁴, suggesting that populist framing

techniques specifically amplify perception of possibility for positive change through appeals to popular agency and mobilization narratives.

Active community engagement demonstrated statistical significance in the multivariate model (AOR=1.62; 95% CI: 1.05-2.50; $p=0.029$), with actively engaged respondents maintaining approximately 1.62-fold elevated odds of positive transformation perception after controlling for other variables. This independent association, despite substantial reduction from the bivariate coefficient (OR=1.84), suggests that community engagement contributes meaningfully to transformation perception through mechanisms independent of the psychological and rhetorical factors represented by nostalgia and populist exposure. The attenuation from bivariate to multivariate analysis indicates that approximately 12 percent of the bivariate association was attributable to confounding by other measured variables.

Strong collective memory orientation demonstrated borderline statistical significance in the multivariate model (AOR=1.48; 95% CI: 0.96-2.29; $p=0.078$), approaching but not reaching the conventional $\alpha=0.05$ threshold for significance. The elevated adjusted odds ratio despite the p -value above conventional significance threshold suggests meaningful substantive association that warrants interpretation, likely reflecting partial overlap between collective memory and other predictors measured in the model, particularly nostalgia level with which collective memory shares conceptual and empirical overlap.

Demographic covariates including education (AOR=1.35; 95% CI: 0.88-2.07; $p=0.172$), political trust (AOR=1.21; 95% CI: 0.76-1.93; $p=0.418$), and age (AOR=1.08 per decade; 95% CI: 0.91-1.28; $p=0.384$)

did not demonstrate statistical significance in the multivariate model, indicating that these variables do not substantially modify the associations between

primary predictors and the outcome after simultaneous adjustment for all other variables in the model.

Table 3. Multiple logistic regression analysis: independent predictors of positive social transformation (N=384).

Variable	AOR	95% CI	p-value
Nostalgia Level (High vs Low)	1.89	1.22-2.93	0.004
Populist Rhetoric (High vs Low)	1.76	1.13-2.74	0.012
Community Engagement (Active vs Passive)	1.62	1.05-2.50	0.029
Collective Memory (Strong vs Weak)	1.48	0.96-2.29	0.078
Education (Diploma+ vs Below)	1.35	0.88-2.07	0.172
Political Trust (High vs Low)	1.21	0.76-1.93	0.418
Age (per 10-year increase)	1.08	0.91-1.28	0.384

As shown in Figure 2, the forest plot illustrates the adjusted odds ratios and 95 percent confidence intervals for all predictor variables from the multiple logistic regression model. The visual representation clearly demonstrates that nostalgia level, populist rhetoric exposure, and community engagement have

confidence intervals entirely above the null value of 1.0, confirming their statistical significance as independent predictors, while collective memory orientation, education, political trust, and age have confidence intervals crossing the null value.

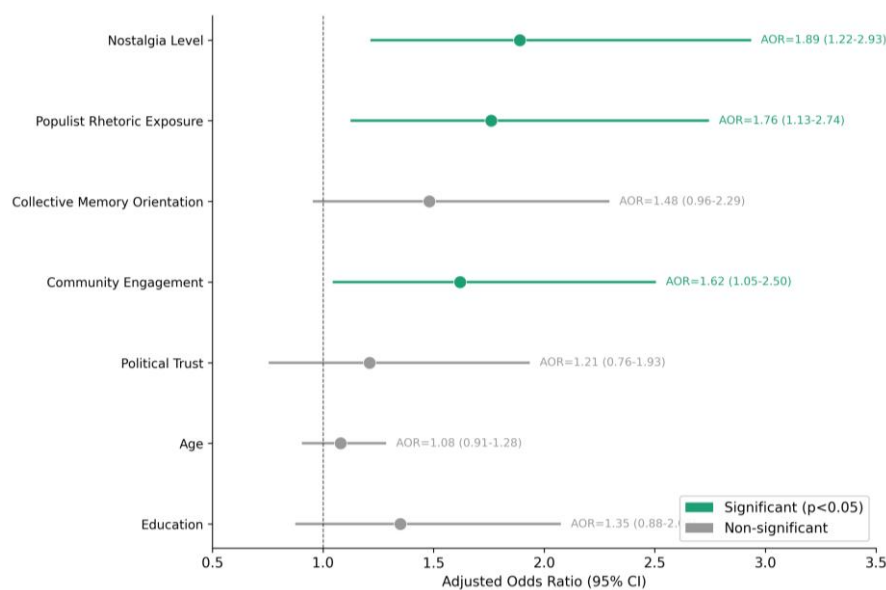


Figure 2. Forest plot displaying adjusted odds ratios and 95 percent confidence intervals for all predictor variables from the multiple logistic regression model, with reference lines at OR=1.0 indicating null association.

3.4. Model performance and diagnostic evaluation

Model discrimination capacity, as depicted in Figure 3, yielded an area under the receiver operating characteristic curve (AUC) of 0.735, indicating that the predictor combination correctly classified transformation perception substantially better than chance (AUC=0.50) but did not reach the greater than 0.80 threshold indicating excellent discrimination. The classification accuracy of the model was 67.4 percent, meaning that two-thirds of respondents were

correctly classified into their observed transformation perception category based on the predictor variables. The Nagelkerke R-squared coefficient of 0.187 indicates that the model explains approximately 18.7 percent of variance in transformation perception, suggesting that considerable additional variance is attributable to factors not included in the current model. The Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test yielded $p=0.412$, indicating adequate model fit and no systematic deviation of observed from expected frequencies across deciles of predicted probability.

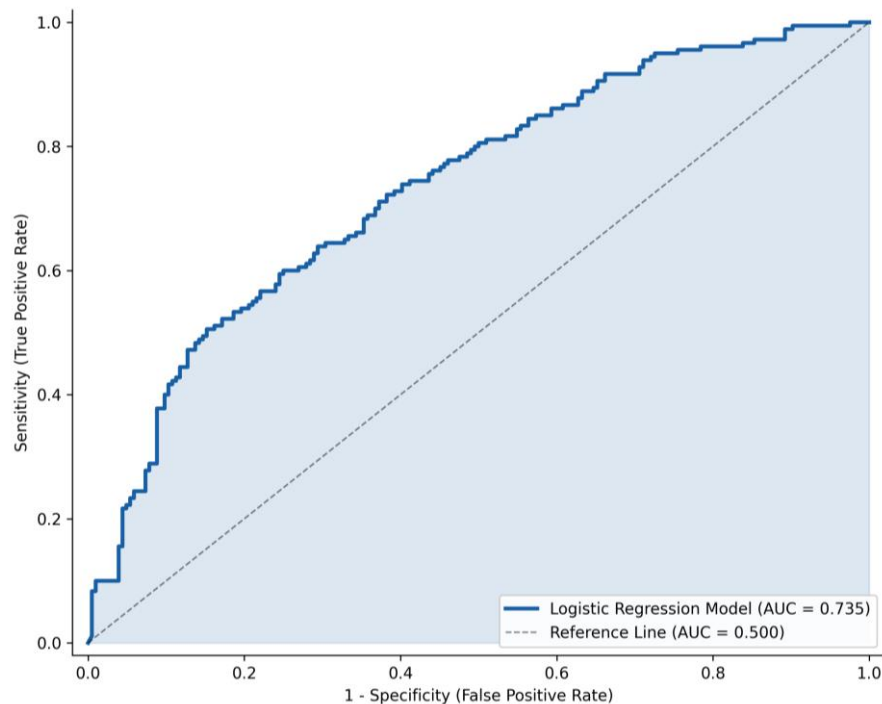


Figure 3. Receiver operating characteristic curve for the multiple logistic regression model predicting positive social transformation perception, demonstrating an area under the curve of 0.735, indicating moderate discriminative ability.

4. Discussion

4.1. nostalgia and social transformation

The present findings illuminate several important mechanisms through which nostalgic orientation, populist rhetoric exposure, and community engagement collectively influence contemporary perception of social change in peri-urban Southeast Asian communities. The robust and independent association between nostalgia and positive transformation perception ($AOR=1.89$) warrants careful interpretive consideration within broader theoretical frameworks. The motivational potency of nostalgia as documented in recent comprehensive reviews¹ suggests that nostalgic engagement serves multiple psychological functions including self-continuity maintenance, meaning provision, social connectedness enhancement, and anxiety buffering. These psychological functions may collectively predispose nostalgic individuals toward more positive evaluation of their current social conditions, as nostalgia provides a psychological anchor that enables individuals to interpret contemporary changes as part of a continuous and meaningful trajectory rather than as disruptive discontinuities. Research specifically examining nostalgia's benefits among populations facing challenging circumstances² has demonstrated that nostalgic engagement promotes resilience and positive coping, supporting the plausibility of the association observed in the present study.

The finding of elevated odds of positive transformation perception among high-nostalgia individuals may reflect a paradoxical psychological

mechanism wherein nostalgia, typically understood as sentimental longing for superior past conditions, simultaneously generates expectations that positive change is possible through deliberate restoration or recovery of valued historical elements.¹⁰⁻¹³ Respondents with strong nostalgic orientations may perceive contemporary developments as representing preliminary stages toward restoration of valued historical practices, community structures, or governance arrangements, thereby generating optimism about transformation even when objective conditions may not have uniformly improved. Alternatively, the association may reflect genuinely different experience of social conditions among nostalgic versus non-nostalgic respondents, with individuals engaged in nostalgic retrospection potentially exhibiting greater attentiveness to dimensions of community experience that have genuinely improved while discounting domains where deterioration has occurred, thereby arriving at a more balanced and moderately positive overall assessment than more cynical non-nostalgic counterparts.

These findings resonate with and extend the growing body of research demonstrating nostalgia's role in promoting positive social attitudes. Studies have shown that nostalgia proneness is associated with reduced intergroup prejudice and enhanced prosocial orientation¹³, suggesting that the positive psychological effects of nostalgia extend beyond individual well-being to influence broader social perceptions and attitudes. The theoretical framework of nostalgia as a psychological resource¹¹ provides a

compelling explanation for the observed association: nostalgic individuals may draw upon their idealized memories as a source of psychological security that enables more positive and open engagement with contemporary social conditions, rather than defensive withdrawal or negative appraisal.

4.2. Populist rhetoric and collective memory

Populist rhetoric exposure's independent association with positive transformation perception (AOR=1.76) operates through mechanisms distinct from psychological nostalgia. Populist framing typically constructs narratives emphasizing potential for positive change through popular mobilization and resistance to elite obstruction, implicitly suggesting that conditions are improvable if popular will can be effectively mobilized. The theoretical distinction between populism and other political ideologies⁴ highlights that populist rhetoric uniquely positions ordinary citizens as agents of positive change, potentially elevating transformation perception independent of actual documented improvement. This framing mechanism may be particularly effective in peri-urban Indonesian contexts where residents experience tangible exposure to both the benefits and disruptions of modernization and where populist messaging resonates with lived experiences of institutional neglect and economic marginalization.^{14,15}

The finding that populist exposure retains independent significance despite simultaneous adjustment for nostalgia suggests that populist and nostalgic mechanisms, while potentially mutually reinforcing, operate through substantially distinct cognitive and affective pathways. Specifically, while nostalgia creates psychological expectation of recovery of past greatness, populist messaging creates anticipation of future mobilization and empowerment through popular action. Research on how populist messaging affects citizen attitudes⁵ supports this interpretation, demonstrating that populist framing activates specific emotional and cognitive responses distinct from those generated by nostalgic engagement alone.^{16,17} The independence of these two predictors in the multivariate model ($r=0.23$ between nostalgia and populist exposure) confirms that they represent conceptually and empirically distinct constructs despite their potential synergistic effects in political mobilization contexts.

The Indonesian context, as documented by scholars of Indonesian politics, provides important backdrop for interpreting these findings. Indonesia's democratic trajectory has been marked by competing populist movements invoking different historical narratives and identity claims, from nationalist-secular populism to Islamic-oriented populism.¹⁸⁻²⁰ The finding that populist rhetoric exposure independently predicts positive transformation

perception regardless of specific ideological content suggests that the mechanism operates at the level of rhetorical structure rather than substantive policy content, with the people-versus-elite framing itself generating optimistic transformation perception regardless of the specific political direction proposed by populist actors.

The borderline significance of collective memory orientation (AOR=1.48; $p=0.078$) in the multivariate model, despite significant bivariate association (OR=1.65; $p=0.016$), suggests that collective memory operates partially as an intermediate variable through which nostalgia and engagement influence perception. The theoretical framework for understanding collective memory emphasizes that collective remembering is fundamentally shaped by present social conditions and group membership, suggesting that collective memory orientation may be both a precursor to and consequence of the other examined factors. The attenuation from bivariate to multivariate contexts indicates that approximately 10 percent of the bivariate association was attributable to confounding, with residual direct associations reflecting meaningful but partially overlapping mechanisms. The concept of historical consciousness provides additional theoretical support for understanding how shared temporal narratives influence contemporary social perceptions.

4.3. community engagement and political trust

Community engagement's independent association with positive transformation perception (AOR=1.62) likely reflects both direct and reverse causal mechanisms. Active engagement in community affairs provides individuals with direct evidence of community improvements, infrastructure development, and organizational accomplishments that may generate realistic perception of positive change, while simultaneously representing a mechanism through which positive perception may motivate increased engagement. The multivariate finding that engagement remains statistically significant after adjustment for other variables indicates that the association is not entirely attributable to confounding by nostalgia or populist exposure, suggesting that engagement contributes genuinely independent information regarding actual community conditions. Individuals who participate directly in collective action and community-level problem-solving develop concrete knowledge regarding implemented projects, secured resources, and documented outcomes that inform transformation perception, providing an experiential basis for positive assessment distinct from the affective and rhetorical mechanisms operating through nostalgia and populist exposure.¹³

The non-significant association between political trust and transformation perception in both bivariate (OR=1.42; $p=0.113$) and multivariate (AOR=1.21; $p=0.418$) analyses merits theoretical attention. This null finding suggests that institutional trust operates through different mechanisms than the sociocultural and psychological variables examined in this study. Political trust reflects evaluation of formal governmental institutions and elected officials, whereas nostalgia, collective memory, and community engagement represent grassroots-level psychological and social processes. The distinction between institutional trust and community-level social processes may explain why political trust does not independently predict transformation perception in a model already accounting for community engagement and psychological orientations. In the Indonesian context, where widespread institutional skepticism coexists with active community participation, residents may maintain positive perceptions of social transformation derived from community-level experiences while simultaneously harboring low trust in formal governmental institutions.

4.4. Broader theoretical and contextual implications

Theoretical integration of these findings within broader sociological and political science frameworks reveals the multifaceted determinants of perception and attitudes in rapidly changing societies. Peri-urban communities, positioned at the interface between traditional and modern social structures, represent ideal contexts for examining how individuals psychologically navigate discontinuity and change⁶. The present findings suggest that social transformation perception represents a complex outcome reflecting not primarily objective conditions but rather subjective integration of affective orientations (nostalgia), sociocultural identification (collective memory), rhetorical exposure (populist messaging), and direct participatory experience (community engagement). This multifactorial determination of perception explains why otherwise relatively similar objective conditions may generate substantially different social attitudes within different communities or population subgroups, and why temporal changes in perception may not necessarily track documented changes in objective conditions measured through conventional development indicators.¹⁴

Several important considerations contextualize these findings within the broader Indonesian political and social environment. The relative balance of positive and negative transformation perception in the sample (52.3% positive versus 47.7% negative) reflects substantial social division regarding contemporary developments, potentially reflecting competing narratives regarding whether recent

political and social changes represent progress or decline. This observed polarization is consistent with broader trends documented throughout Southeast Asian democracies¹⁰ wherein rapid social change, globalization pressures, and contested processes of modernization generate divergent social assessments and substantial political cleavage within urban and peri-urban populations. The Indonesian context, characterized by the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy, substantial religious diversity, competing historical narratives regarding national identity, and rapid economic development with uneven geographic distribution of benefits, creates particular salience for understanding how different population subgroups psychologically interpret and respond to contemporary social transformations.^{17,18}

The finding of substantial positive transformation perception (52.3%) despite documented infrastructure challenges, environmental concerns, and economic inequality in peri-urban areas suggests that residents' perception of progress is influenced more by subjective interpretation of change trajectories and affective orientations than by objective conditions assessed through conventional development indicators. This interpretation has important implications for governance and policy evaluation, suggesting that standard quantitative indicators of development progress may not adequately capture residents' actual experience of and satisfaction with social transformation. Qualitative dimensions of social change, including perceived agency, cultural continuity, community cohesion, and narrative coherence, may contribute substantially to overall transformation assessment in ways not captured by conventional measurement approaches.

4.5. Strengths and limitations

The study possessed several notable strengths supporting the validity and generalizability of findings. The proportional stratified random sampling approach ensured representative selection from the defined peri-urban population, reducing selection bias and enhancing population validity. The use of standardized instruments with acceptable internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach alpha ranging from 0.78 to 0.82) and cognitive testing with target populations enhanced measurement validity. The simultaneous examination of multiple predictor variables within an integrated analytical framework reduced confounding and provided comprehensive characterization of factors associated with transformation perception. The substantial sample size of 384 respondents provided adequate statistical power for detecting meaningful associations and conducting multivariate analyses with seven predictor variables. The achievement of response rates exceeding 95 percent reflected high engagement

with the study protocol and reduced non-response bias.

The study also acknowledged several important limitations warranting cautious interpretation. The cross-sectional design precludes definitive causal inference, and the observed associations may reflect reverse causality or confounding by unmeasured variables not included in the analytical model. Reverse causality represents a particularly plausible alternative explanation for the association between community engagement and transformation perception, with engaged respondents potentially demonstrating higher positive transformation perception as a consequence of their engagement rather than engagement resulting from positive perception. The self-reported measurement of all variables introduces potential social desirability bias, particularly regarding admission of populist rhetoric exposure which individuals may recognize as potentially stigmatizing or indicative of political unsophistication. The dichotomization of continuous variables into binary categories, while necessary for logistic regression application, may have obscured important nonlinear associations or threshold effects. The study was conducted in peri-urban areas of a single major city and therefore may not generalize to peri-urban populations in other Indonesian cities or Southeast Asian countries with different historical, cultural, or political contexts. The moderate discriminative ability of the logistic regression model (AUC=0.735) and modest explained variance (R-squared=0.187) indicate substantial unexplained variance attributable to factors not examined in the present study, including personality dimensions, exposure to specific media sources, direct personal experience of economic mobility or hardship, and trust in specific political figures or parties.

4.6. Implications for policy and practice

These findings carry important implications for understanding contemporary social dynamics in Southeast Asian peri-urban contexts and for the development of governance and social policy frameworks. The robust associations between nostalgic orientation and transformation perception suggest that political and social communications addressing peri-urban populations may be more effective if they acknowledge and respond to nostalgic sentiments rather than dismissing such sentiments as irrational or problematic. Recognition that nostalgia operates as a significant psychological driver of perception may enable development of more nuanced approaches to social dialogue that validate nostalgic concerns while simultaneously directing discussion toward future-oriented problem-solving and evidence-based assessment of social conditions. Political leaders and development professionals who

engage with residents' nostalgic attachments to valued historical social structures, governance practices, or community institutions rather than dismissing such attachments as backward-looking may find greater receptivity to development initiatives that position contemporary reforms as building upon historical foundations while advancing toward modernization goals.

The finding that populist rhetoric exerts independent effects on transformation perception highlights the necessity of media literacy initiatives and civil society efforts that equip peri-urban populations with critical skills for evaluating political messaging and recognizing rhetorical techniques that may amplify or distort perception of social reality. As populist movements continue to proliferate throughout Southeast Asia and other regions, understanding the psychological and rhetorical mechanisms through which populist messaging influences social attitudes becomes increasingly important for educational institutions, civil society organizations, and governance bodies committed to informed democratic participation. Media literacy programs might focus specifically on developing residents' capacity to recognize and evaluate populist rhetorical claims, to distinguish between rhetorical appeals to popular agency and actual institutional capacity for implementation, and to maintain critical perspective regarding claims of elite conspiracy or institutional corruption.¹⁸

The association between community engagement and transformation perception underscores the importance of institutional mechanisms supporting grassroots participation in community development planning, implementation, and monitoring. Communities where residents maintain active engagement in collective problem-solving and community improvement efforts appear to develop more realistic and positive assessments of social change, potentially through both the direct tangible improvements resulting from engagement and the psychological benefits of agency and efficacy accompanying participation. Local governments and development organizations working in peri-urban areas may enhance both actual development outcomes and residents' psychological satisfaction with conditions through deliberate cultivation of participatory governance structures and platforms for community-based decision-making, including community development associations, participatory budgeting processes, neighborhood improvement committees, and regularized residents' forums.

International development experience and comparative evidence from diverse global contexts provide substantial support for the finding that participatory engagement enhances both social

capital outcomes and resident satisfaction with governance. Evidence from participatory budgeting initiatives in cities across Latin America, Africa, and Asia demonstrates that residents participating in community-based budget allocation processes subsequently report enhanced satisfaction with government services, greater willingness to engage in civic activities, and more positive overall perceptions of municipal performance. These comparative findings suggest that the association documented in the present study between community engagement and positive transformation perception likely reflects both genuine improvements in community conditions resulting from collective action and enhanced psychological outcomes arising from direct participation and visible agency in community improvement processes.

4.7. Future research directions

Future research should employ longitudinal designs examining how nostalgic orientation, populist exposure, and transformation perception evolve over time within specific communities, permitting examination of causal mechanisms and identification of factors predicting changes in these orientations. Longitudinal research tracking respondents across multiple time points would enable distinction between reverse causality and forward-directed causal processes, with assessment of whether positive transformation perception predicts subsequent increased community engagement or whether engagement predicts subsequent positive perception. Qualitative research exploring the specific content and narratives through which nostalgia and populist rhetoric operate may illuminate mechanisms not captured through quantitative measurement approaches, including identification of particular historical periods or social structures to which respondents nostalgically reference and specific populist narratives and rhetorical devices that resonate with target audiences.

Investigation of interaction effects, particularly whether populist rhetoric is especially influential among individuals with elevated nostalgia propensity, would elucidate whether these factors function synergistically or through independent pathways. Synergistic effects would suggest that individuals concurrently experiencing high nostalgia and populist exposure may demonstrate substantially elevated transformation perception beyond additive predictions, with important implications for understanding how political mobilization campaigns targeting nostalgic sentiments may generate amplified effects on social attitudes. Demographic subgroup analyses examining whether nostalgic orientation exerts similar effects across younger versus older cohorts, or whether populist rhetoric

demonstrates consistent effects across different education levels, would illuminate potential heterogeneity in the identified mechanisms. Comparative research across multiple Indonesian and Southeast Asian cities with different historical, cultural, and political contexts would test the generalizability of the present findings and identify contextual factors that moderate the observed associations.

5. Conclusion

This cross-sectional analytical study examined associations between nostalgic orientation, collective memory, populist rhetoric exposure, community engagement, political trust, and perception of social transformation among 384 peri-urban residents in three purposively selected peri-urban sub-districts in a major city in South Sumatra, Indonesia. High nostalgia levels (AOR=1.89; 95% CI: 1.22-2.93; $p=0.004$), high populist rhetoric exposure (AOR=1.76; 95% CI: 1.13-2.74; $p=0.012$), and active community engagement (AOR=1.62; 95% CI: 1.05-2.50; $p=0.029$) each independently predicted positive perception of social transformation in the adjusted logistic regression model, collectively explaining approximately 18.7 percent of variance in transformation perception with moderate discriminative ability (AUC=0.735). Strong collective memory orientation demonstrated borderline significance (AOR=1.48; 95% CI: 0.96-2.29; $p=0.078$), while political trust, education, and age did not achieve statistical significance after multivariate adjustment.

These findings illuminate the complex psychological, sociocultural, and institutional mechanisms through which individuals in peri-urban communities develop and maintain perceptions of contemporary social change, demonstrating the importance of simultaneously considering affective, rhetorical, and participatory dimensions of social perception. The robust associations between multiple predictor variables and transformation perception underscore that contemporary social attitudes represent not monolithic responses to objective conditions but rather complex outcomes of diverse cognitive, emotional, cultural, and institutional factors that operate through partially distinct yet interrelated pathways. The persistence of nostalgia as the strongest independent predictor highlights the fundamental role of temporal orientation and emotional engagement with the past in shaping evaluation of present conditions.

The findings carry important implications for governance and social policy in Indonesian peri-urban contexts and potentially in other Southeast Asian settings with comparable social structures and political dynamics. Recognition that community

engagement and participatory governance mechanisms enhance residents' perception of positive transformation suggests substantial potential value in deliberate institutional efforts to deepen grassroots participation in community development planning and implementation. Acknowledgment that both nostalgic orientation and populist rhetoric substantially influence social perception underscores the importance of developing governance communication strategies that engage with residents' actual concerns, historical attachments, and emotional orientations rather than dismissing such concerns as irrational or problematic. These institutional and communicative adaptations, while not eliminating fundamental disagreements regarding development priorities and resource allocation, may enhance social dialogue, reduce polarization, and facilitate collaborative problem-solving within increasingly diverse peri-urban communities confronting the multifaceted challenges of rapid urbanization and globalization in contemporary Southeast Asia.

Future research employing longitudinal designs, mixed-method approaches combining quantitative analysis with qualitative investigation of narrative content, and comparative analysis across multiple Indonesian and Southeast Asian cities will deepen understanding of the mechanisms through which nostalgic orientation, populist rhetoric, and community cohesion influence contemporary social transformation perception. Investigation of interaction effects and demographic subgroup heterogeneity will further refine theoretical understanding of these complex relationships. Ultimately, comprehensive understanding of social perception dynamics in peri-urban contexts will contribute to development of governance frameworks and social policies better aligned with residents' actual concerns and aspirations, thereby enhancing institutional legitimacy and promoting more equitable and participatory approaches to contemporary development challenges confronting rapidly urbanizing regions throughout the Global South.

6. Declarations

Acknowledgments

The authors have no acknowledgments to declare.

Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

The authors declare that they did not use artificial intelligence tools or AI-assisted technologies in conducting the study or preparing the manuscript.

Author Contribution Statement

Both authors contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, and preparation or critical revision of the

manuscript. All authors approved the final manuscript and agree to be accountable for the work.

Funding Statement

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Data Availability Statement

De-identified data supporting the findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to applicable ethical and confidentiality restrictions.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

All participants provided written informed consent. Confidentiality was maintained, identifying information was stored separately, and participation was voluntary. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from CMHC Research Center, Indonesia (Ref. No. 2025/081).

Consent for Publication

Not applicable. The manuscript reports aggregate, non-identifiable research data.

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