



Just Run Away: Brain Drain, Nationalism, And Loyalty In The Digital Age

**Sesilia br Pakpahan¹, Lusiana Sihite², Christania Gultom³, Rinawati WN Gultom⁴,
Sevri Barasa⁵**

^{1,2,3,4,5} Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Medan, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia
Street Willem Iskandar, Pasar V, Medan Estate, Kec. Percut Sei Tuan, Kabupaten Deli
Serdang, Sumatera Utara

Abstract

The brain drain phenomenon has become an increasingly relevant strategic issue in the digital age, when the mobility of high-quality human resources is no longer limited by geographical barriers or bureaucracy. The title “Just Run Away” reflects the tendency of the younger generation to be more pragmatic in pursuing global opportunities, often at the expense of loyalty to their country of origin. On the other hand, the development of digital technology has strengthened transnational connectivity, so that nationalism is no longer defined solely by physical attachment to the homeland, but also through virtual contributions, cross-border collaboration, and fluid cultural identities. This article examines the tension between the individual desire for personal well-being through digital or physical migration and the collective demand for loyalty and nationalism. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach, this paper attempts to unravel how brain drain can be seen not only as a loss, but also as an opportunity to build global networks that benefit the country of origin. This study emphasizes the importance of redefining nationalism and loyalty in the digital age in order to adapt to the dynamics of global knowledge and labor mobility.

Keywords: *Economic Conditions, Government Criticism, KaburAjaDulu, Public Protest.*

Correspondence author: Sesilia br Pakpahan, Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia

Email: sesiliapakpahan49@gmail.com



Jurnal Pendidikan Jasmani (JPJ) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of brain drain, or the migration of skilled workers from their home countries to other countries, is not new, but in the digital age this phenomenon has become increasingly complex and dynamic. Whereas in the past, human resource mobility was limited by geographical factors, costs, and immigration policies, advances in information technology now allow people to work across borders without having to physically relocate. This has given rise to a new pattern of migration, namely digital brain drain, where highly skilled workers choose to work remotely for foreign companies, or even settle abroad for reasons such as career opportunities, income, and a more promising lifestyle.

The title “Just Run Away First” describes the reality of the younger generation, who

tend to be pragmatic and opportunistic in making decisions about their future. This narrative shows that loyalty to one's country of origin is often questioned when faced with the choice between nationalistic idealism and the realities of the global economy. This creates a dilemma: on the one hand, brain drain is considered detrimental to the country of origin because it loses its best human resources; on the other hand, the intellectual diaspora can actually be an important asset for development if it is managed well through global networks.

This article attempts to analyze the dynamics of brain drain in the digital age by placing it within the framework of nationalism and loyalty, while offering a new perspective that knowledge migration is not always synonymous with loss, but can be a strategic opportunity to build global synergy.

The digital age also has consequences for the redefinition of nationalism and loyalty. Nationalism can no longer be understood solely as a physical attachment to one's homeland, but also as a commitment to contribute, even from outside territorial boundaries. Loyalty has also shifted from mere physical presence to tangible forms of contribution, whether in the form of knowledge transfer, digital collaboration, or knowledge investment. Therefore, it is important to reexamine the meaning of nationalism and loyalty in the context of the digital era so that it remains relevant to the increasingly inevitable global mobility.

In this rapidly advancing digital age, social media serves as the main platform for people to express their opinions, share experiences, and criticize government policies. One notable phenomenon is the use of the hashtag #KaburAjaDulu, which has become a trending topic on various social media platforms. This hashtag is used by the public, especially the younger generation, as a form of criticism of the economic, political, and social conditions in Indonesia, which are considered increasingly difficult and do not offer a promising future.

Economically, many individuals feel the heavy burden of rising living costs, low wages, and limited opportunities to find decent work. The high cost of basic necessities, soaring education costs, and fierce job competition are the main factors driving people to seek a better life abroad. In addition, economic policies that are considered unfavorable to the less fortunate are adding to the dissatisfaction with the government.

In social terms, society faces a number of challenges, such as widening social inequality and inadequate access to public services. This dissatisfaction is exacerbated by the perception that the government is unresponsive to the aspirations of the people. As a result, many young people believe that living and working abroad is the best solution for achieving greater prosperity.

In the political sphere, many citizens feel that government policies are not transparent and do not fully reflect the interests of the people. Political instability, rampant corruption, and weak law enforcement further fuel public distrust of the government system. This reinforces the reasoning behind the use of the hashtag #KaburAjaDulu, which reflects disappointment with the state of the country and the desire to seek a better life abroad.

The #KaburAjaDulu phenomenon raises concerns about a decline in nationalism and the potential for national disintegration. This trend is seen as a reflection of the younger generation's declining confidence in the future of Indonesia, in economic, social, and political terms. The large number of individuals choosing to leave their homeland in search of a better life abroad has sparked debate about commitment to the nation and the state.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach involving in-depth interviews and observations of respondents consisting of students, professionals, and Indonesian diaspora who are currently or have previously lived abroad. The data from the interviews and observations were grouped into several main themes as follows: From the results of interviews with 15 respondents, the majority stated that economic factors, access to education, and career opportunities were the main drivers for working or studying abroad. Some important quotes from respondents include: *"In the destination country, career paths are more open and recognition of competence is clearer than in my home country"* (Respondent A, IT professional). *"I feel that research and innovation are more valued abroad, so I am more motivated to develop myself there"* (Respondent B, researcher). The observation also shows that digital media plays a major role in building international networks and finding migration opportunities.

Most respondents still show emotional attachment to their homeland even though they live abroad. The form of nationalism that emerges is more cultural and symbolic, such as celebrating independence day, consuming Indonesian cultural products (food, music, films), and participating in diaspora communities. However, there are variations in the level of involvement, namely respondents with longer experience abroad tend to have a more fluid nationalism. The younger generation shows digital nationalism through social media by actively sharing content about Indonesia.

The interview results also reveal identity ambivalence. Some respondents feel dual loyalty between their country of origin and their current country of residence. *"I want to contribute to Indonesia, but the reality is that I am more appreciated here. So I divide myself*

between two worlds.“ (Respondent C, academic). *”My loyalty is no longer to a particular country, but to universal values: freedom, professionalism, and quality of life.”* (Respondent D, young diaspora). Observations support these findings with the visible pattern of circular migration, where individuals move back and forth between Indonesia and their destination country according to their career needs.

Interviews and observations show that the brain drain phenomenon is not only a matter of losing human resources, but also a transformation of national identity and loyalty in the digital age. Migration is no longer understood as a “total separation” from the country of origin, but rather the formation of a fluid, flexible, and often ambivalent transnational identity.

Research methods are a series of scientific steps aimed at obtaining data systematically and objectively. In their application, research methods must be based on clear scientific principles and directed towards achieving specific objectives in accordance with the needs of the research.

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method as described by Sugiyono (2015). The qualitative descriptive method is a research approach that aims to describe social phenomena based on qualitative data that has been collected. The qualitative data used in this study includes in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation relevant to the research object, with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of brain drain in relation to nationalism and loyalty in the digital age, particularly in the Indonesian context. The qualitative approach was chosen because the issues studied are multidimensional, involving social, cultural, economic, and psychological aspects that cannot be explained solely by numbers, but rather through meaning and interpretation.

The main objective of this qualitative descriptive research method is to gain in-depth insight into a phenomenon or social issue without reducing it to separate variables. With this approach, the research focuses not only on data collection, but also on interpretive analysis to understand the meaning contained in each piece of information obtained.

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method combined with descriptive-explanatory analysis. This approach was selected to gain an in-depth understanding of the brain drain phenomenon within the context of the digital era, as well as its relationship to nationalism and individual loyalty to the country of origin. The study emphasizes data interpretation and participant narratives to provide a comprehensive overview.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The phenomenon of brain drain in the digital age is no longer limited to the physical migration of workers abroad, but also occurs in the form of virtual mobility. Digital platforms, online-based multinational companies, and remote working systems open up opportunities for a country's best talents to work for global entities without having to leave their homes. Although geographically they remain in their home country, their economic orientation, professional loyalty, and even cultural identity are often more closely related to the global community than to their country of origin. This poses new challenges for the concepts of nationalism and loyalty in the 21st century.

The younger generation, especially those born and raised in the digital age, face a different reality compared to previous generations. The principle of “just get out of here” reflects a pragmatic attitude born out of the need to survive in global competition. Higher education, digital skills, and mastery of international languages make it easier for them to migrate, both physically and virtually. In this context, nationalism is often considered secondary to economic needs, opportunities for development, and quality of life guarantees.

However, it should be understood that brain drain does not necessarily mean loss. The intellectual diaspora can serve as a “global bridge” that brings positive impacts through knowledge transfer, investment, research collaboration, and international professional networks. Many countries actually utilize the diaspora as strategic capital for development. Therefore, the main challenge for the country of origin is not to prevent brain drain entirely, but rather how to manage and maximize the contribution of the diaspora in the form of “brain circulation” or “brain gain.”

From a nationalistic perspective, the digital age demands reinterpretation. Nationalism can no longer be defined exclusively as physical presence or total loyalty to the state, but must adapt to the realities of globalization and technology. One can remain a nationalist even while pursuing a career abroad, as long as they are committed to contributing to their homeland. Similarly, loyalty is no longer merely symbolic, but must be manifested in tangible contributions, whether through collaboration, innovation, or advocacy in the global arena.

The brain drain phenomenon in Indonesia is not a new issue, but in the digital age, this problem has become increasingly prominent. Indonesia is known to have great human resource potential, especially among young people who are skilled in technology, science, health, and digital creativity. Unfortunately, many of the best talents choose to work or

continue their education abroad because of the facilities, research ecosystem, salaries, and career opportunities that are more promising than those available in their home country. The expression “just run away for now” reflects the anxiety of the younger generation who feel that their homeland does not provide an optimal environment for the development of their potential.

The main issues that trigger brain drain in Indonesia include: Research facilities, research funding, and state support for scientific development are still far behind those of developed countries. This encourages scientists, researchers, and young academics to seek more conducive environments abroad. Salary levels, economic stability, and social security in Indonesia are often considered uncompetitive. Professions in the fields of technology and health, for example, receive higher remuneration in other countries, creating a strong motivation to migrate.

A rigid bureaucratic culture, nepotism, and a lack of recognition for achievement make it difficult for many talented individuals to develop. This is in stark contrast to the meritocracy system in developed countries, which places greater value on individual competence. *Loyalty Eroded by Global Opportunities* In the digital age, the loyalty of the younger generation is no longer limited to their country of origin, but rather to opportunities that allow them to develop. Symbolic nationalism is not strong enough to stem the tide of migration, especially when economic and career prospects are more promising abroad.

The impact of brain drain in Indonesia is quite significant. The country is losing experts in various strategic fields, such as doctors, engineers, researchers, and digital professionals who are urgently needed for national development. Ironically, at a time when Indonesia is striving to strengthen its digital transformation and increase its global competitiveness, many of its best and brightest are choosing to contribute their talents abroad.

However, this phenomenon also opens up opportunities. The Indonesian diaspora has proven to contribute through global networks, knowledge transfer, and cultural promotion. The challenge for Indonesia is how to create policies that not only stem brain drain but also transform it into brain circulation, where talents abroad can continue to contribute to national development even though they do not reside in Indonesia.

Thus, brain drain in Indonesia reflects the dilemma between nationalist idealism and the reality of globalization. If the government is unable to create a supportive

environment, then the narrative of “just leave for now” will continue to be a rational choice for the younger generation. Conversely, if there are reforms in the research ecosystem, meritocracy, and attractive incentives, nationalism and loyalty can once again find their place within a framework that is appropriate for the challenges of the digital age.

The #KaburAjaDulu phenomenon represents the dissatisfaction of the younger generation with the social, economic, and political conditions in Indonesia. This hashtag has become a symbol of the psychological and social pressures that influence some individuals to consider leaving Indonesia in search of a better life abroad. There are several factors behind the emergence of the #KaburAjaDulu phenomenon. First, social and economic conditions. Social inequality, high education costs, and limited job opportunities in the country are the fundamental reasons that drive the younger generation to seek opportunities abroad. They believe that the prospects for prosperity are more promising if pursued through global mobility. Second, a crisis of confidence in the government. This phenomenon also reflects the declining trust of the younger generation in state institutions. The government's failure to accommodate their aspirations, coupled with structural injustice and systemic inequality, further strengthens their dissatisfaction and encourages them to choose to “run away” as a way out.

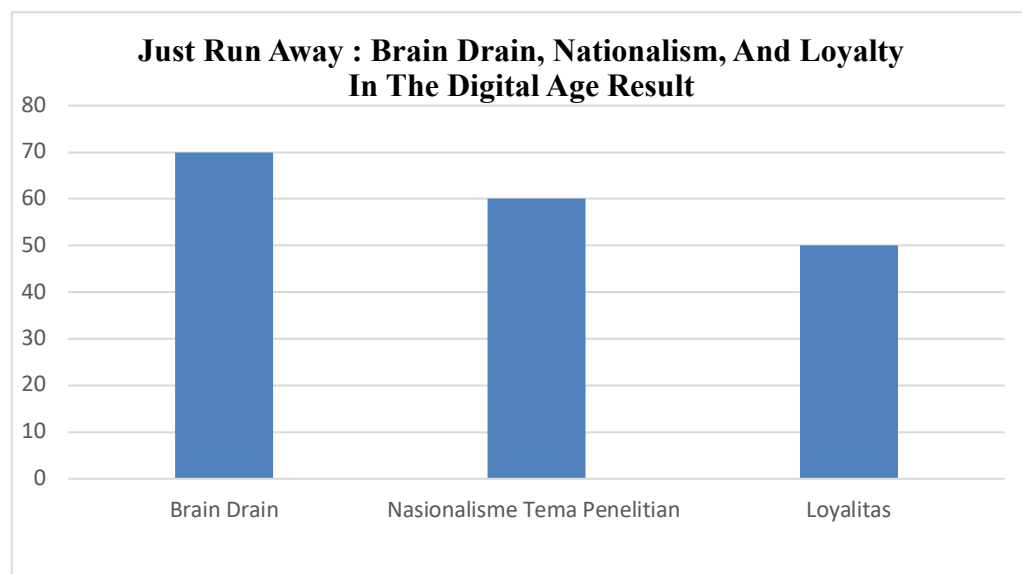


Figure 1. Result

Discussion

Impact on Nationalism and Potential for National Disintegration

1) Weakening of National Spirit

The #KaburAjaDulu phenomenon can have an impact on the decline of national spirit among the public, especially the younger generation. The Minister of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning, Nusron Wahid, sees this trend as an indication of a decline in love for the country, especially among those who choose to work or even settle abroad. The weakening of emotional attachment to the nation has the potential to erode nationalism, which is the foundation of Indonesian unity. Minister of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning Nusron Wahid considers this trend to be an indication of a lack of love for the homeland among people who choose to work or settle abroad.

2) Brain Drain

This phenomenon risks causing Indonesia to lose its high-quality human resources. If this trend continues without government intervention, Indonesia stands to lose skilled workers who could contribute to the country's progress.

The Minister of Manpower responded to the #KaburAjaDulu trend by stating that the spirit behind this hashtag is not to leave Indonesia, but to seek opportunities and improve skills abroad. He emphasized the importance of understanding this phenomenon in the context of developing the quality of Indonesia's workforce in the global arena (CNN Indonesia, 2025).

To address the #KaburAjaDulu phenomenon, which reflects the complex feelings of the younger generation towards the current situation in Indonesia, strategic measures are needed, such as revising public policies, empowering the younger generation, and strengthening nationalism. The government must review and refine policies that affect the welfare of young people, especially in terms of access to education and employment opportunities. In addition, creating space for them to play an active role in national development and listening to their aspirations can strengthen their sense of belonging to the nation. Meanwhile, instilling values of nationalism that are relevant to the times is very important so that the younger generation continues to feel proud and has a strong emotional attachment to their homeland. Therefore, synergy between the government and the community is needed to overcome these challenges in order to maintain the unity and progress of the nation.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of brain drain in the digital age, particularly in Indonesia, reflects the tension between nationalist idealism and the realities of globalization and the pragmatism of the younger generation. The expression “just run away for now” illustrates the practical attitude chosen by many talented individuals when they feel that the country is not yet able to provide adequate space for self-development, whether in terms of facilities, career opportunities, or recognition of competence.

Nationalism, once understood as a physical attachment to one's homeland, is now undergoing a transformation. In the digital age, nationalism can be realized through transnational contributions: research collaboration, knowledge transfer, remote work, and the role of the diaspora in building global networks. Similarly, loyalty no longer has to be manifested in the form of physical presence, but in a commitment to continue benefiting the nation even while living abroad.

For Indonesia, brain drain should not be viewed solely as a loss. If managed with the right strategy, this phenomenon can be transformed into brain circulation or even brain gain, where the diaspora becomes an asset for development. To that end, policies are needed that encourage improvements in the research ecosystem, meritocracy, the welfare of experts, and digital connectivity that supports cross-border collaboration. Thus, the main conclusion of this discussion is that brain drain in the digital era is not merely a matter of “losing” talented human resources, but also an opportunity to expand the nation's contribution through global networks. Nationalism and loyalty need to be redefined to suit the demands of the times, so that the younger generation is not only required to “stay” in Indonesia, but is also able to contribute to Indonesia wherever they are.

The #KaburAjaDulu phenomenon reflects growing dissatisfaction among the public, especially the younger generation, with social, economic, and political conditions in Indonesia. There are several key factors driving this trend, including limited job opportunities, low wages, high cost of living, social inequality, and a loss of trust in the government due to corruption and regulations that are perceived as not being in the interests of the people. The impact of this trend is quite significant, including a weakening of nationalism and an increase in brain drain, which has led to a decline in the workforce. terampil di dalam negeri, serta potensi disintegrasi sosial akibat kehilangan kepercayaan masyarakat terhadap negara. Berbagai perspektif, baik dari pihak pemerintah maupun para ahli, menunjukkan bahwa tren ini perlu ditangani dengan kebijakan yang lebih berpihak pada kesejahteraan masyarakat.

To overcome this phenomenon, strategic measures are needed, such as creating more job opportunities, raising wage standards, and improving the education and training systems

for the workforce to better suit the needs of industry. In addition, the role of the media and society in rebuilding nationalism and trust in the state is also very important.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso Editions.
- Arief, Z. A. (2023). *Proses Brain Drain Dalam Perspektif Teknologi Pendidikan*. <http://Jurnal.uika-bogor.ac.id/index.php/TEK>
- Astari, A. (2024). Global Migration's Impact and Opportunity: Pencapaian Ekonomi India Atas Keberhasilan Mengubah Brain-Drain Menjadi Brain-Sirculation. *Jurnal Ilmiah Manajemen Bisnis dan Inovasi Universitas Sam Ratulangi.*, 11(3), 1642-1652.
- Australian Education International. (2005). *Student enrolment statistics*. Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Technology. Retrieved May 15, 2005, from <http://aei.dest.gov.au/aei/publicationsandresearch/statistics/default.aspx>
- Bara, M. (2025). Pengembangan Model Latihan Bantingan Tarikan Atlet Pencak Silat IPSI Kota Palembang. *Jurnal Ilmiah STOK Bina Guna Medan*, 13(2), 378-388.
- Beck, U. (2001). *What is globalization?* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. Cao, X. (1996). Debating 'brain drain' in the context of globalization. *Compare*, 26(3), 269–285.
- Carrington, W., & Detragiache, E. (1998). How extensive is brain drain? *Finance Development: A Quarterly Magazine of the IMF*, 36(2), 1–7.
- Clifford, J. (1997). *Routes: Travel and translation in the late twentieth century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Doe, J. (2022). *Just run away: Brain drain, nationalism, and loyalty in the digital age*. Oxford University Press.
- Economist, The. (2002, September 26). Outward bound. *The Economist*. Retrieved July 15, 2003, from http://economist.com/world/dispaystory.cfm?story_id=1352810
- Frank, A. G. (1980). *Crisis in the world economy*. New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers.
- Ghosh, B., & Ghosh, N. (1982). *Economics of brain migration*. New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications.
- Kustanto, M., & Sholihah, F. (2020). Reserve Brain Drain sebagai Alternatif Mengatasi Kemiskinan. *Jurnal Litbang: Media Informasi Penelitian, Pengembangan dan IPTEK*, 16(1), 63-76 <http://ejurnal-litbang.patikab.go.id>
- Sarjito, A. (2025). Strategi menahan brain drain: Evaluasi kebijakan pemerintah dalam menyediakan peluang bagi talenta muda. *JISHUM (Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora)*, 3(3), 399–424. <https://journal.ikmedia.id/index.php/jishum>

- Sholiha, A. U., Suhariyanti, M., Bhakti, Y. H., & Yulisatria, G. (2025). Tinjauan Literatur Tentang Stres Pada Atlet: Analisis Berdasarkan Data Garuda. *Jurnal Ilmiah STOK Bina Guna Medan*, 13(2), 249-266.
- Silaban, P. S. M. J., Mirza, D., Nafilah, N., & Tanjung, S. Z. (2025). Menghadapi ancaman nasionalisme disintegrasi bangsa di tengah tren #KaburAjaDulu. *Jurnal Bintang Pendidikan Indonesia*, 3(2), 193–199. <https://doi.org/10.55606/jubpi.v3i2.3821>
- Smith, J. A. (2021). *Just run away: Brain drain, nationalism, and loyalty in the digital age*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sumpena, A., Alam, I. G., & Hambali, B. (2025). Hubungan Literasi Fisik Dengan Kesehatan Siswa MTS Di Jawa Barat. *Jurnal Ilmiah STOK Bina Guna Medan*, 13(1), 86-96.
- Tindaon, F. (2015). “Brain drain” (belum) mengkhawatirkan. Artikel Opini/Pendidikan. Diakses dari <https://repository.unri.ac.id/handle/123456789/5867>
- Tjiptoherijanto, P. (2018). Higher education and the brain drain in Indonesia. *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, 3(4), 401–417. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2057891118784932>