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INTRODUCTION

In 2019, a series of elections in the Southeast Asian countries of Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand highlighted the salience of digital media in political campaigns and insidious modes of electoral manipulation. Despite new legal, technical, social, and educational efforts to mitigate “fake news,” our comparative research analysis of elections in the three countries observes that digital disinformation has become further entrenched in electoral processes.

We observe that a wider range of political actors and parties enlisted a diversity of digital campaign specialists and paid out “buzzers” (Indonesia), “trolls” (Philippines), and “IOs (information operations)” (Thailand) to circulate manipulative narratives

discrediting their political opponents. Some politicians even fanned the flames of religious (Indonesia/Thailand) and ethnic conflict (all three) in their communities in a desperate bid to score votes. Meanwhile, tech platforms, journalists, and fact-checkers struggle to catch up with disinformation architects’ savvy innovations. Rather than mitigate disinformation, state actors and government legislators across these countries have been found to be directly responsible for producing political disinformation themselves.

This report offers a regional assessment of current practices in election-related social media manipulation and interventions with the aim of mitigating future risks in the global





AIMS OF THE REPORT

To summarize trends of election-related disinformation production in Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand, offering a regional assessment of current practices in election-related social media manipulation and interventions with the aim of mitigating future risks in the global context.



RESEARCH METHODS

Research methods are primarily qualitative—drawing from interviews with politicians, campaigners, digital strategists, and journalists—and digital ethnography based on long-term observation of online communities across social media platforms.

context. This report synthesizes original research separately conducted by Ong (Thailand) and Tapsell (Indonesia) as well as collaborative research they conducted for an election integrity intervention in the Philippines. Our research methods are primarily qualitative—drawing from interviews with politicians, campaigners, digital strategists, and journalists—and digital ethnography based on long-term observation of online communities across social media platforms.¹

This report summarizes trends of election-related disinformation production from these three Southeast Asian countries to offer insight and comparison for other countries. Their high level of digital activity, robust (sometimes underground) digital economies, and complex histories of political polarization possibly preview forthcoming global trends.

These three countries are ranked in the top 5 countries in the world in terms of time spent on the Internet: The Philippines ranked first with the average citizen spending 10 hours per day on the Internet, Thailand in third with over 9 hours per day, and Indonesia in fifth with over 8 hours per day.² This intensity of digital activity facilitates innovation and enterprise including for the global disinformation economy: Instagram clickfarms in Indonesia have been found to service overseas clients³ while the Philippines' thriving and unregulated influencer economy previewed influencer marketing strategies later seen in the 2020 US Democrat primaries.⁴ Of course, the Philippines was famously dubbed by a Facebook executive as "patient zero" in the fight against disinformation when "fake news" sites emerged in the lead-up to the 2016 Philippine election, months before similar strategies were documented for the Brexit vote and Trump's election in the US.⁵



Thailand's own political history characterized as one of "deep polarization"⁶ also offers up unique normative questions for comparative research: while some democracies long for a return to rational deliberation in fair and independent mediated spaces, what normative ideals for political participation are available in societies with political fractures that run so deep?

These three countries also point to patterns and qualities of disinformation and election integrity interventions that are different from dominant trends in Euro-American contexts. **Whereas regulatory debates in western Europe and North America have increasingly spotlighted the responsibility and accountability of tech platforms to enhance their content moderation of hateful and manipulative content, these Southeast Asian countries have struggled to systematically engage tech platforms.**

With the exception of Singapore, Southeast Asian countries' engagements with tech companies have been led by journalists, civil society, and academics rather than legislators. In Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines tech platforms unevenly rolled out election integrity interventions: Facebook focused energies into enlisting third-party fact-checkers but withheld their transparency mechanism for political advertising previously made available in other regions.⁷ Our research found little evidence that Twitter, Google, and Line actively engaged with stakeholders in government or civil society across the three countries.

A central challenge for disinformation intervention in Southeast Asia is governments' and legislators' political opportunism where social media's threat to election integrity is used by the state to justify control of the information ecosystem. Singapore and Malaysia have offered their neighbors seductive models of all-encompassing "fake news laws" that assign government enormous powers of takedown and censorship in social media.⁸ These so-called "solutions" could have snowball effects for legislative interventions in a region where leaders display authoritarian aspirations. Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand have shown a predilection to target free speech of dissenters. Governments in the region could use moral panics of "fake news" to extend surveillant powers of the state and consolidate support for the current administration.

It is crucial to note here that our separate research found no evidence of foreign interference in elections in these three countries if we understand this as the production of manipulative content in one country seeking to influence political outcomes in electoral events elsewhere. However, as previously reported in a separate report⁹, Filipino digital strategists have admitted to receiving campaign budgets directly from mainland Chinese business tycoons to boost the election warchest of city mayor candidates with whom they wish to conduct business.



Key trends in election-related disinformation and interventions

This report highlights five key trends in election-related disinformation and interventions to be discussed in the succeeding sections:

1) Political incumbents were largely victorious across the three Southeast Asian countries. Incumbents made use of the state's information machinery to amplify particular political narratives in elections. Incumbents also strategically harnessed the regulatory mechanisms of election campaigns and social media content monitoring to their advantage. Opposition candidates are more likely spotlighted and penalized for their campaign violations than incumbents.

2) However, disinformation production has diversified and "democratized," where a broader set of political leaders and workers are involved for electoral as well as commercial gains.

3) While social media platforms became more central political battlegrounds for heated debate and "trolling," they were *not* determining of electoral outcomes. Grassroots mobilization and "ground machinery" remained crucial in rallying rural and/or working-class populations. Social media however are important platforms to seed narratives that would influence mainstream media agenda and political conversation at large.



Key trends:

1

Incumbents made use of the state's information machinery to amplify particular political narratives in elections.

2

Incumbents strategically harnessed the regulatory mechanisms of election campaigns and social media content monitoring to their advantage.

3

Disinformation production has diversified and "democratized".

4

Social media platforms were not determining of electoral outcomes. Grassroots mobilization and "ground machinery" remained crucial.

5

Tech platforms applied different and uneven interventions.

6

The consequence of an expanded disinformation landscape is ever-deepening polarization.



4) Tech platforms applied different and uneven interventions and it's unclear whether there is a coherent strategy in their engagements with local election commissions and fact-checkers.

5) The consequence of an expanded disinformation landscape is ever-deepening

polarization: across political party, but crucially also race, class, religion, and generation. The ramifications of election-related disinformation extend beyond the political to the social and cultural and will have far-reaching effects.

SOUTHEAST ASIAN ELECTIONS: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

	 Indonesia	 Philippines	 Thailand
Political System	Reasonably consolidated democracy since 1998 but with political parties increasingly weakening	Democratic republic with separation of powers across executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government; president is elected for a six-year term.	Formally a constitutional monarchy, with bicameral parliamentary system crafted under military tutelage following the seizure of political power in May 2014 by a junta known as the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) ¹⁰
2019 Elections in Context	<p>Presidential and legislative national elections</p> <p><i>Rematch between incumbent president Jokowi, a 'moderate' populist, and Prabowo Subianto, an 'extreme populist', defeated in 2014</i></p>	<p>Competitive national and local elections for legislative seats in Senate, Congress, and local offices</p> <p><i>Elections seen as a referendum of Rodrigo Duterte's presidency (elected in 2016)</i></p>	<p>National elections for 500 MPs, and the subsequent selection of the prime minister</p> <p><i>A victory for the military-aligned Palang Pracharat Party would mean popular endorsement for the coup-makers and a collective acceptable that semi-authoritarianism would remain. A victory for the Pheu Thai Party (a vehicle for the anti-establishment Shinawatra family which had produced two former prime ministers) would suggest a rejection of the junta and a return to fully-fledged electoral politics.</i></p>
Outcome	Jokowi's reelection represents consolidation of his power, forms rainbow cabinet, including making Prabowo his Defense Minister.	Resounding victory for Duterte-aligned politicians at the national-level, with a number of surprise victories for local posts	Coup-era premier Prayuth Chan-ocha was extended after the military-aligned parties won the election.



SOUTHEAST ASIAN ELECTIONS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

INDONESIA: Deepening divides and creating violent new fractures

Indonesia's political system is a competitive democracy, where citizens directly elect a president to lead the country. On April 17, 2019, Indonesia held simultaneous elections for the first time, as voters chose their president, members of parliament and local representatives. The presidential elections saw incumbent Joko Widodo win over opposition candidate Prabowo Subianto with around 55 percent of the vote. Recent elections prior to 2019 in Indonesia had been framed by religious tensions, and voters were divided over the role that Islam should play in political life. Indonesia was seen to be increasingly "polarized" around these lines, with "pluralist" Muslims and non-Muslims supporting Jokowi, and more conservative and pious Muslims supporting Prabowo.¹¹ The divide was also seen in geographical terms in the archipelago, with more conservative, pious Muslim regions of Sumatra allied heavily toward Prabowo, while non-Muslim Eastern Indonesia heavily favoring Jokowi.¹² A key electoral battleground, including in the disinformation space, revolved around this tension of Islam and the State, most heavily in the populous area of Java.

It is not common for losers of Indonesia's presidential elections to publicly concede defeat. In 2014, losing presidential candidate Prabowo and some of his supporters famously declared he in fact had won the election over his rival Jokowi, which they based on their own exit polls. Television stations which campaigned for Prabowo broadcast these announcements regularly. But in 2014, this action did not lead to mass protests or violence from citizens. In 2019, Prabowo's team questioned the legitimacy of the election, citing problems with voter lists and other irregularities, even before the election had taken place.¹³ Yet in the announcement that followed the 2019 election result in May, which once again declared Jokowi victorious over Prabowo, thousands of Indonesians protested (and rioted) in front of the election commission in Jakarta, and banners claimed that the election had been rigged by the incumbent president. The post-election violence that occurred in 2019 has led to debates around the influence of hoax news and disinformation, and the impact of a divisive and polarizing online campaign¹⁴, especially given that in 2019 some of the main television stations did not declare Prabowo victorious, as they had in 2014.



 **PHILIPPINES:**
consolidating power

The Philippines held a midterm election on May 13, 2019, midway through President Duterte's six-year term. The resounding victory enjoyed by Duterte's allies in national races meant that his policies—a war on drugs, a new political and economic alliance with China that sets aside long-running territorial conflict, and plans for constitutional change—are likely to gain more support in the second half of his term.¹⁵ The most visible and historic electoral victories were in the Senate races, where opposition politicians failed to win a single seat among the 12 available. This meant that the 24-person chamber that has traditionally checked the power of the executive branch would only have three sitting opposition senators. Elections for lower house posts similarly favored Duterte's allies, which meant that his administration consolidated control over two legislative branches, while holding sway over the judicial branch.

The Philippines' political system has traditionally been characterized as being one of "strong personalities and weak parties,"¹⁶ where the many political parties have actually no ideological differences and elite coalitions fluidly form around popular charismatic figures of the particular moment. A key difference in political conversation in 2019 was the overt differentiation and labeling of political parties. Pro-Duterte supporters continued to attack and mock Liberal Party candidates

(also known as "yellows" or *dilawan*) as members of the old elite establishment. Various conspiracy theories linked Liberal Party "establishment" politicians with other traditional authority figures such as journalists, thus reinforcing the angry us-versus-them populist narrative that has been the trademark of Duterte's regime.¹⁷

The 2019 elections also represented a wholesale adoption of social media campaigning by politicians across the political spectrum. As late as 2016, social media were platforms for underfunded candidates who used these as cheaper substitutes to more expensive television ads and grassroots machinery. Comparing research findings on social media in elections 2016¹⁸ and 2019¹⁹, we observed a larger number of candidates across political parties using social media to target voters and mixing official campaigns with "underground" armies.

 **THAILAND: Deep polarization continues, and a generational faultline emerges**

The political system in Thailand is a bicameral parliamentary system, where the 500-member lower house is elected by a combination of local constituency and party list seats, while the 250-member Senate is appointed. While Thailand is formally an absolute monarchy, the palace, in coordination with the military, has frequently exercised extra-constitutional powers in recent decades.



A complicating factor in the election was the entry of new players into the equation: a second pro-Thaksin party called Thai Raksa Chart, and a highly visible, new generation party known as Future Forward. Another question concerned the orientation of two pragmatic medium-sized parties, Bhumjai Thai and the Democrats, would they back the military or support an opposition prime minister?

The major winners in the election were the NCPO and the Palang Pracharat Party – though this was not clear in the immediate aftermath of the constituency counts on election night. Opposition parties actually made a strong showing in the election, and Pheu Thai secured the largest number of seats. In principle, Pheu Thai should have been able to form an administration, but the pro-military side used delays in announcing the official election results to stitch together an improbable coalition propped up by micro-parties. Despite winning a greater number of parliamentary seats, the opposition parties were unable to form a government or to block General Prayuth's return to the Government House. Another major loser was opposition Thai Raksa Chart Party, which was banned in the middle of the election for "illegally" nominating former princess Ubonratana Mahidol as a prime ministerial candidate. This draconian action by the Election Commission and the Constitutional Court tipped the balance in favor of the military establishment. Another crucial factor in the outcome was a decision by the Election Commission to change the

way in which party list seats were allocated after the results had come in—a decision that moved a number of seats away from opposition parties and into the hands of more biddable micro-parties.

The overall outcome of the 2019 elections in Thailand was to reinforce the deep polarization of Thailand's politics into two camps, which could be roughly defined as pro-establishment (supporting the monarchy and the military, but anti-Thaksin and anti-establishment (supporters of Thaksin but anti-monarchy and military).²⁰ This polarization was also regional, pitting the populous, anti-military North and Northeast against the more conservative greater Bangkok and southern regions. The rise of the Future Forward party also introduced a new faultline: a generational divide between older voters who grew up respecting the monarchy and Thailand's traditional institutions, and digital natives who are weary of paternalistic rhetoric, unconvinced by their parents' conservative worldview, and extremely independent-minded.



DISINFORMATION INNOVATIONS OF 2019

Mapping Disinformation Work Models²¹

This chapter builds on a previous NATO Stratcom COE report which identified four disinformation work models which can be used to categorize how disinformation and fake news are produced. The models were developed based on experiences and observations from the Philippines national elections in 2016 and midterm elections in 2019. The report can be found on [NATO Stratcom COE's website](#).

	 Indonesia	 Philippines	 Thailand
 State-sponsored disinformation model	Growing state-sponsored disinformation in response to disinformation campaigns by opposition actors	Reinforcing an us-versus-them narrative between incumbent populist leadership versus liberal elite opposition politicians in conspiratorial alliance with journalists	Military exerts control of online conversations and invites volunteers ("cyber troops") to report on critics of the monarchy and military
 Mainstream media propaganda model	Media owners often tied to political parties or individual politicians.	One government-controlled tv channel has low viewership	Broadcast tv channels are aligned with political parties and circulate propaganda appealing to their constituents
 Advertising and PR disinformation model	Political candidates hire advertising/PR consultants as strategists and increasingly more central in campaign teams compared to pollsters	Political candidates hire advertising/PR consultants as their chief strategists during elections in project-based arrangements	n/a
 In-house staff model of disinformation	Politicians have their own social media campaign operators, but disinformation practices are kept at 'arms length' and paid for by political operators	Politician's chief of staff commands their staffers to operate own fake accounts and infiltrate Facebook groups as add-on work	Political parties disseminate messages through social media via FB pages and Line Group. This includes the use of fake accounts and websites.
 Clickbait model of disinformation	Twitter 'buzzers' prominent at national levels. 'Black campaigning' slandering opponents on Facebook and WhatsApp increasingly common.	Facebook banned network of pages associated with clickbait websites; YouTube saw proliferation of pro-Duterte YouTube channels with many ad breaks	n/a



 **INDONESIA: “When they go low, we go lower”**

Disinformation production largely remains a hidden industry in Indonesia, where the main actors and funders are shielded from public scrutiny. It is difficult to identify which falsehood comes from the funded campaigns themselves and which are created and spread from political fans. Despite the insidious nature of disinformation campaigning, the foreign and Indonesian media reported networks of disinformation even before the election year of 2019.²²

“Buzzers” are the Indonesian word for paid “trolls,” who are paid to comment and spread information with the hope of raising the electability of their candidate. Indonesia’s leading investigative journalism magazine, *Tempo*, revealed that both camps were relying on what the exposé called “shadow teams,” attacking each other using “fake news spread by proxies” – a form of “black campaigning that could not be carried out by candidates’ official teams”.²³ A subsequent *Reuters* investigation uncovered groups of ‘fake news peddlers’ who, according to the article, appeared to want to exploit “ethnic or religious divides”.²⁴ In early October in Indonesia, 42 Facebook pages and 34 Instagram accounts were taken down by Facebook.²⁵ Facebook named a company InsightID, linked to a centre founded by Indonesian Vice-President Jusuf Kalla.

As much as Indonesia’s politicians have been warning the people about disinformation,

it is largely they and their teams who are producing fake news during election times. One campaigner for Jokowi made this case for resorting to disinformation when she said: “Michelle Obama said, ‘When they go low, we go high.’ But it didn’t work. Trump won. So here, when they go low, we go lower”.²⁶ The Jokowi government’s decision to respond to disinformation with disinformation signals a dangerous backsliding for democracy in Indonesia. For example, in 2014 Twitter discourse during televised election debates was an avenue for wider discussion in the emerging digital public sphere. In 2019, Twitter “buzzer” teams organize “trending” hashtags in support of their candidate, especially during the televised debates, where hashtags of “Jokowimenangdebat” (Jokowi wins debate) or “Prabowomenangdebat” (Prabowo wins the debate) are trending even before the debate has started.

 **PHILIPPINES: Disinformation from the black market to the boardroom**

Unlike Indonesia, the Philippines’ chief disinformation architects do not operate in shadowy black markets but work off the respectability of the corporate boardroom. Politicians’ election campaign consultants are leaders in the advertising and public relations industries, known for their management of high-profile corporate brands. Election season is a high holiday for these image consultants as they take on financially lucrative side gigs for political clients.²⁷



While the advertising and PR disinformation work model also operates off-campaign season, it is in the three months leading to election day that its digital operations are fully activated: lead strategists assemble teams composed of social media influencers, parody meme accounts, pop culture accounts, and fake accounts infiltrating closed groups on Facebook. As our previous study has found, strategists and their teams coordinate both “official” campaign messages promoting their clients while planning underground “attack” messaging against opponents.²⁸

These attack campaigns are not often blatantly illegal or hateful, though they also involved instances of slutshaming, fatshaming, and poking fun of people’s darker skin. However, these digital operations are very manipulative: they strategically evade election commission regulations around campaign spending; they artificially engineer “trending” hashtags on Twitter; and they involve fake account operators infiltrating organic fan communities on Facebook.

As our previous NATO StratCom study reported, the advertising and PR model works alongside other disinformation work models.²⁹ The in-house staff model meant that individual politicians encouraged their own staff members to operate fake accounts as add-on work to their primary job. What was more evident in 2019 was how this expanded beyond national races to include election disinformation in local races such as city mayor. Politicians’ own staff members on the ground are assumed to have intimate

knowledge of local culture and language and could thus operate more “authentic” and “organic”-sounding accounts than high-level influencers convened at the national level.

There is also the purely profit-driven clickbait disinformation model in operation in the Philippines. Most notorious here is the case of Twinmark Media Enterprises, whose 220 Facebook Pages, 73 Facebook accounts, 29 Instagram accounts were taken down by Facebook for “coordinated inauthentic behavior” five months before the election.³⁰ Subsequent revelations by a company whistleblower suggest that Twinmark’s social media activity was a commercial enterprise optimizing the advertising technology infrastructures of Facebook’s Instant Stories and Google’s Ad Sense.

During the elections, one conspiracy theory dominated public conversation: Filipino news organizations were insinuated as part of an “Oust Duterte” plot to destabilize government. This story, later debunked by fact-checkers³¹, was first published by a newspaper columnist with an official government position and who later claimed his source was no less than the President himself. Vera Files, one of Facebook’s local third-party fact-check partners called for the government to stop the “intimidation of independent media” through their seeding of conspiracy theory. It was also during election season when journalist Maria Ressa co-founder of an online news start-up critical of the President, was arrested a second time on the charges of violation of foreign ownership laws.³²



THAILAND: State- and Mainstream Media-Led Disinformation

Compared to the other two countries, Thailand’s primary disinformation models are the state-sponsored model and the mainstream media model. The state-sponsored model involved strong military surveillance and direct censorship of online conversation. This includes top-down coordination of “information operations (IOs)” to monitor so-called “defamation” of the monarchy³³ and soliciting from the bottom-up citizen reporting and exposing critics of the monarchy.³⁴

Thailand’s broadcast media system over the past 15 years has also evolved to a bipartisan model of highly biased media, centered on pro-establishment outlets such as Nation TV and Blue Sky, which are in turn countered by anti-military establishment channels

such as Voice TV. “Neutral” newsreaders have been replaced and overshadowed by partisan commentators who use a *lao khao* (news-talk) style, offering highly editorialized readings of events and becoming political influencers themselves. During the 2019 election campaign, Nation TV, during its *lao khao* program, aired a faked telephone conversation supposedly between Thaksin and the charismatic Thanathorn of the anti-establishment Future Forward party³⁵. News anchors in pro-establishment media invoke conspiracy theories to discredit political opponents and promote support of the military and monarchy. Media channels sympathetic to anti-establishment parties meanwhile promote their own partisan readings of political events, but more often practice self-censorship in order to avoid any shutdowns by the military.

Emergent Platforms and Innovations

	 Indonesia	 Philippines	 Thailand
Most popular digital platforms	Facebook and WhatsApp	Facebook and Twitter	Facebook and Line
Emergent platforms in 2019	Instagram; Telegram	Instagram; YouTube; closed groups on Facebook	Facebook Live; YouTube; closed groups on FB and Line
Influencer trends in 2019	Instagram Islamic charismatic preachers	from mega-influencers supporting admin and opposition; to micro-influencers seeding narratives to smaller groups	mainstream media pundits remain as the central opinion leaders
Automated social media manipulation	Regular use of bots	minimal use of bots, usually only to boost follower counts on Twitter	n/a



Multiplatform campaigning was a central feature of political communication across the three countries. While Facebook remained the most popular social media platform, other platforms and communities emerged as important for politicians to reach specific demographics and constituencies. We found the use of bots to be quite limited, as all three countries have cheap, readily available workforce to enlist for digital campaigns.

INDONESIA: The rise of WhatsApp

Indonesians with internet access are more likely to use platforms which are more effective in slower internet speeds, such as Facebook's "free basics" and messenger sites like WhatsApp and Telegram. Facebook remains a dominant platform for social media campaigning and political advertising due to its widespread usage, but is becoming less prevalent in usage for younger people because of its ubiquity: they see their parents, extended family, work colleagues and more and want a more "exclusive" site where they can post material more to their friends.³⁶ In urban areas with stronger internet signals such as Jakarta and Bandung there is a growing trend towards Instagram usage. Instagram is still an emerging space for disinformation production in Indonesia³⁷ and elsewhere through "click farms"³⁸, but there have been cases of political attack memes, such as when pro-Jokowi political fans posted misogynist speech against former celebrity turned Prabowo campaigner Neno Warisman.³⁹

Twitter is generally used by urban elites in Indonesia, and those over 30 years old, but Twitter is useful for generating discussion through elites and media professionals⁴⁰, and as we have heard, manipulating "trending topics" is a common practice for "buzzers". Indonesian campaigners told us that they would often test "black campaign" and other narratives on Twitter to see how well their material would spread, and if they spread well, they would then produce extra or other related material for YouTube and WhatsApp.

Indonesia is similar to other democracies with large populations, such as Brazil and India, where WhatsApp is a central platform for misinformation and disinformation due to its widespread usage and emergence of a culture of sharing information via private chat group groups. Many Indonesians are members of numerous WhatsApp groups that comprise of family, extended family, work, school friends, university alumni and much more. In many workplaces WhatsApp is more common than email for discussion.

Most social media campaign teams in Indonesia have a wide array of WhatsApp groups that they manage. Their job is to organize a network of "volunteers" to spread content within organic communities. A popular way to create disinformation or "black campaigns" against your opponent is to upload a scandalous photo or YouTube video and spread it widely through WhatsApp groups. These scandals can eventually get picked up by the mainstream online media, who may report the material as a



“black campaign”, but such reportage still adds fuel to the fire. Meanwhile, messenger site Telegram has long been an important platform for radical Islamists, both in recruiting and spreading of propaganda.⁴¹ Due to its encryption, Islamists see it as being the safest platform to avoid monitoring from police, and was briefly banned by the Indonesian government, before being allowed to operate again. Telegram remains a space for a wide range of conspiracy theory and political and religious propaganda content in the country.⁴²

 **PHILIPPINES: Micro-media-manipulation by micro-influencers and infiltrators of closed groups**

Digital campaigning in 2019 was multiplatform, extending beyond Facebook and Twitter to cover YouTube and Instagram, with clear intentions to seed political messages to discrete groups of unsuspecting voters. Our research observed the rise of a more diffused network of micro- and nano-influencers—the seemingly benign online celebrities targeting smaller, niche audiences—designed to fly under the radar and evade detection of fact-checkers and content moderators.⁴³

In 2016, high-profile bloggers and macro-influencers with millions of followers rallied political support for their clients but subsequently faced backlash from overexposure or social blunders. In 2019, strategists relied instead on armies of micro- and nano-influencers (with followers

less than 100,000) as they appear more “organic” and “authentic”, with less baggage and notoriety that could trip up social media content moderators.

On Facebook and Twitter, political parody accounts that took on the persona of politicians or government officers were used to poke fun at the gaffes and excesses of their targets. Mainly used by the political opposition (similar to the Thai example below), they used emotionally arousing and occasionally vulgar language. Another genre of accounts on Facebook and Twitter were pop culture accounts whose fun and frivolous content would mix in the occasional political post supporting a candidate.⁴⁴ Unlike celebrities or the aforementioned political bloggers with millions of social media followers and mainstream media visibility, these personalities nevertheless cultivate more intimate and interactive relationships with their fans.⁴⁵

On YouTube, hyper-partisan channels became hugely popular and undoubtedly profitable with their misleading and clickbait headlines that use emotionally arousing language aimed at rallying and profiting from Duterte supporters.⁴⁶ The channel crafts thumbnails displaying titillating headlines, decontextualized photographs, and brand impersonations in order to bait curious readers.

Another innovation in campaigns is the more prolific use of Facebook closed groups in spreading election-related



disinformation.⁴⁷ Disinformation tactics here can either be explicitly political and hyper-partisan or discreetly seeding paid political propaganda. The most significant closed groups spreading “fake news” were Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) closed groups supporting particular politicians at national and local levels as well as conspiracy theory groups that discreetly slipped in political content between various anti-vaccine or flat earth conspiracies. These closed groups can become cesspools of conspiracy theory, as they spread a variety of anti-establishment and anti-mainstream media narratives.

Finally, one disinformation innovation is the use of fitness and lifestyle Instagram micro-influencers, usually attractive and shirtless men, to promote political candidates. While these are not explicitly disinformative, the practices of “thirst-trappers”⁴⁸ to seed political messages in between shirtless selfies intentionally evade campaign finance disclosure rules set by the election commission as they deleted political posts from their Instagram grid at the end of the campaign season.

 **THAILAND: Generational divides between anti-establishment younger people on Twitter and pro-establishment older people on Line**

In Thailand, Facebook usage remains extremely high and undoubtedly played an important role in the campaign. Popular Thai politicians maintained large numbers of followers and operated official profiles

while mobilizing their fans in closed groups. Facebook reflected the deeply polarized political system in Thailand, where echo chambers of pro-monarchy yellows and anti-monarchy reds spoke among themselves but did not come into confrontation.⁴⁹

In contrast, Twitter was a platform of direct contestation and conflict. With its more relaxed policies around the use of real names, Twitter enabled anti-establishment critics to be more vocal and aggressive as they could hide behind pseudonymous identities using VPNs that could hide their location. Twitter thus offers slightly more protection compared with Facebook or Line to evade possible punishment from laws on online defamation, which could lead to jail time.

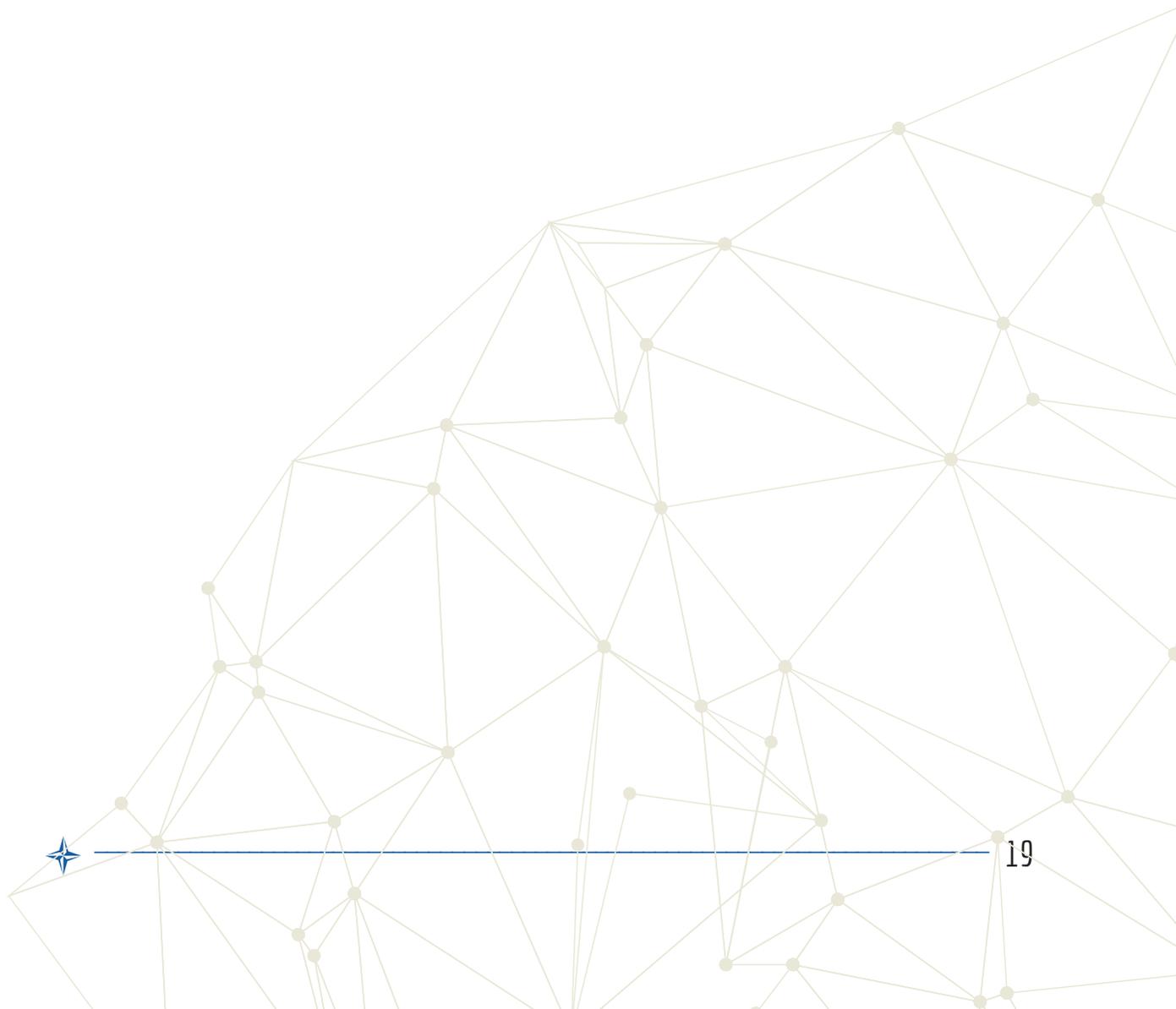
Twitter was also embraced by supporters of the Future Forward Party, an insurgent opposition party that sought to transcend the longstanding red-yellow divide in Thai politics. The attractive Thanathorn became an idol to many Thai teenagers and young adults, who express political fandom in similar grammars of K-Pop fans to the advantage of the digitally savvy, millennial-skewing Future Forward Party.⁵⁰

Facebook Live was a key platform for anti-establishment candidates and mainstream media pundits. Live video is more ephemeral than text and image, which enabled more free-flowing critical political commentary against the establishment to air on the platform with less risk of military censorship and invocation of draconian defamation laws.



Meanwhile, older Thais who tend to be more supportive of the establishment party and monarchy were active on the platform Line. Closed groups on Line composed of older people keeping in touch with their family members and their university classmates and former colleagues. these groups easily become echo chambers that replicate and amplify conservative perspectives. The private nature of these closed groups means they were especially difficult to monitor.

The social media story that emerged in the 2019 elections is that users' choice of platform came to directly reflect their political position.



DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES AND HATE SPEECH

	 Indonesia	 Philippines	 Thailand
Key narratives of disinformation	Questioning candidate's Islamic piety anti-communism anti-China extreme speech	populist narrative demonizing "elite" politicians and the press historical revisionism anti-China extreme speech	nationalist discourse targeting anti-monarchy factions hate speech against Malay Muslim minority

INDONESIA

The main disinformation narratives seen in Indonesia revolve around sowing doubt about candidates' Islamic piety, insinuating candidates' communist ties, and stoking anti-Chinese sentiment. Indonesia is the world's most populous Islamic nation and throughout Jokowi's presidency he has faced consistent disinformation campaigns from conservative Islamists that he is un-Islamic. In the 2014 presidential race, his lead shrank as material circulated stating (incorrectly) that he was Chinese, Christian, and communist.⁵¹ The message has generally taken root: in a national survey in December 2019, one-fifth of respondents who had heard that Jokowi was born to a Christian parent now believed the news, and nearly one-quarter of respondents who had heard that he was Chinese believed that to be true.⁵² A few disinformation narratives in the 2019 election included

claims that president Jokowi wanted to ban religious teaching in schools and abolish the call to prayer.

Anti-Chinese narratives became prominent in the 2017 Jakarta governor election campaign, as incumbent governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama or "Ahok", who is Christian and has Chinese heritage, found himself in political and legal trouble for discussing the Koran. Private WhatsApp groups circulated anti-Chinese conspiracy theories, such as the insinuation that Indonesian Chinese are "Chinese agents" who will eventually allow mainland China to control the economy and government. These anti-China narratives linked up with broader conspiracies relating to national identity, sovereignty, and natural resources. Ahok lost the election, and was eventually jailed for two years for blasphemy in May 2017, released in January 2019.



As we stated earlier, a further serious effect of disinformation tactics is to undermine the credibility of democratic institutions, and indeed the democratic system itself. In the aftermath of the election, protests occurred outside the Elections Supervising Agency, after a hoax that a nearby mosque had been attacked. A video explaining that police were firing near to the mosque was widely circulated amongst Islamist groups on Telegram and other sites.⁵³ Thus, disinformation played a role in discourse around post-election riots in Jakarta, although its precise causal effect remains unclear.

PHILIPPINES

In the Philippines, pro-Duterte politicians' "black campaigning" and disinformative speech continued to advance the dominant populist narrative of Duterte's regime. His message of hate against elite establishment politicians continued to circulate in social media. Both hateful and parodic memes discrediting senatorial aspirant Mar Roxas (who ran and lost against Duterte for the presidency in 2016, and lost again in the senate race) as out-of-touch and weak-willed resurfaced on various platforms. Memes targeted the entire opposition slate *Otso Diretso* as voters were stoked to "flush them down the toilet". None of *Otso Diretso's* candidates ended up winning a seat in the senate. This anti-establishment narrative was also reinforced by conspiracy theory that associated these opposition politicians as working with journalists and foreign funders

to destabilize Duterte's regime. As mentioned, state actors propagated the story of an "Oust Duterte Plot".

Our research also observed many historical revisionist posts that romanticised the accomplishments of the late dictator President Ferdinand Marcos (1965-1986). "Positive" versions of historical revisionist messaging capitalize on nostalgia for the "good old days" in the Philippines, which benefited Marcos' daughter Imee Marcos who won a senate seat, and reinforced Duterte administration's brand of strongman leadership.

Fighting fire with fire, the opposition also tried to marshal extreme speech and disinformation of their own. Attacking Duterte's close ties with the Chinese government, the opposition and meme accounts on social media advanced an anti-China narrative that occasionally slipped into racist expressions against Chinese people, posing threats to multicultural social relations in the country. One political parody account shared a misleading photo of a Chinese toddler defecating in public though the incident did not actually occur in a Philippines mall. The account used racist slur in its captions and mobilized its followers to "fight together" against the Chinese.⁵⁴ While there are good reasons to raise alarm over the administration's policy on China (which set aside the country's territorial dispute with the rising hegemon), the worrisome aspect of this narrative is its tendency to mobilize racist rhetoric for political gains.

THAILAND

The main disinformation narratives included the untrustworthy character of opposition politicians, the anti-monarchy leanings of Future Forward, and alleged links between the leader of the highly popular Future Forward Party with the former prime minister Thaksin.⁵⁵ The opposition were generally portrayed as disloyal to the nation, the palace and the country's traditional institutions. The Election Commission asked for hundreds of anti-military postings to be removed from social media platforms, though most of these posts did not appear to be egregious examples of hate speech or disinformation and were instead expressions of criticism if mixed with some rumor.⁵⁶ One common statement which

was asked to be removed is the statement that Prayut wants to maintain his coup-era power.

The most notorious episode of disinformation in Thailand was the publication on Nation TV of a fake conversation purported to be Thanathorn conspiring with the self-imposed exile and former prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra. Internet users quickly demonstrated that the clip was doctored after it was aired by pro-establishment channel Nation TV.⁵⁷ Despite the rapid exposure of the doctored clip, Nation TV declined to apologize, nor did the Election Commission take any action. Overall we observed an uneven application of the available rules.



LESSONS LEARNED FROM MITIGATING DISINFORMATION

The three countries have markedly different approaches in mitigating disinformation: from top-down state-driven approaches (Indonesia) to strict (yet uneven) enforcement of election campaign rules (Thailand) to bottom-up fact-checking and lobbying of tech platforms (Philippines). Discourses and panics about “fake news” are also rather different across the three countries: the Philippines’ more recent memories of middle-class civility in social media⁵⁸ simplistically characterizes “fake news” as an innovation of Duterte’s regime⁵⁹ in comparison to Thailand’s deeply polarized historical view of “fake news” as political propaganda long perpetuated by partisan media channels.⁶⁰

These discourses result in widely different approaches to how governments and civil society engage with tech platforms: **the Philippines’ active civil society and journalist communities assign a high level of responsibility to social media platforms and their content moderation while other countries highlight more the uneven application of government regulation around speech (Indonesia) and campaign process (Thailand)**. The three countries can certainly learn from each other the range of possible regulatory interventions that can be applied. Clearly, disinformation is a systemic problem that cannot be eradicated

by fact checks or high-publicity platform bans of individual “bad actors” alone. Nor can government legislation be fully trusted to safeguard civil liberties as they can hijack “fake news” panics to target critics and dissenters.

Government regulation and “fake news laws”

The three countries do not have brand new “fake news laws” in the vein of neighboring Singapore’s wide-ranging bill that grants government direct authority over content takedowns.⁶¹ However, Indonesia and Thailand made extensive use of libel, defamation and cybercrime framework to exert control over social media conversations. The Philippines has been more *laissez-faire* in regulating social media expression with its free speech tradition as “Asia’s freest press”.⁶² In the aftermath of the election however, a proposal to adopt the Singapore model of regulating fake news circulates in the Senate.⁶³

In Indonesia we noted the way in which state institutions are employed to limit citizens spreading hoax news and insults against the incumbent – even during an election campaign. In Indonesia, police arrests during the 2019 election have been highly politicized, with arrests only against those who created



	 Indonesia	 Philippines	 Thailand
1. State legislation of “fake news” / social media	Growing use of UU ITE (online defamation law) created in 2008. Police arrests of hoax news distributors all those who created material against the president. No arrest for material which slandered the opposition. Criminal Code of 1946 (treason law) also used.	None, though one has been proposed; high-profile senate hearings in 2018 named-and-shamed mega-influencers supportive of Duterte ⁶⁴ ; older cyberlibel bill referenced by politicians to intimidate anti-Duterte critics and journalists	Amended Computer Crime Act to increase punishment for loosely defined cyber offences, the intensification of content censorship, and the consolidation of state monitoring bodies. Military and their cyber scouts closely monitored the campaign in the name of public safety.
2. New election commission regulations in 2019	None were notable in 2019.	For first time, the election commission required politicians to disclose social media campaign spends and official social media profiles to promote campaign transparency ⁶⁵ . However, without efficient monitoring of actual and “unofficial” digital campaigns, the commission’s implementation of rules had little to no impact.	Election commission is very strong and partisan, with rules arbitrarily applied targeting only opposition candidates. New campaign expenditure rules curbed on-ground grassroots campaigning and criticized as preventing opposition from gaining appeal with the masses.
3. Tech platforms: content takedowns and fact-check partnerships	Facebook announced takedowns networks of “coordinated inauthentic behavior” in late 2018 and early 2019; Facebook has six third-party fact-check partners.	Facebook had 3 high-profile takedowns before and during campaign season, and lower-profile takedowns done without publicity. Facebook has three third-party fact-check partners. Twitter had takedowns without publicity.	Facebook announced the ban on foreign political ads on the platform and denies this was done to comply with government request. Facebook has one third-party fact-check partner.

to spread disinformation material against President Joko Widodo.⁶⁴ These arrests cite the highly controversial Electronic Transactions Law was created in 2008 to monitor online commentary, but has been used more recently used to arrest citizens for creating or distributing hoax news. Freedom House, a US-based watchdog, had argued that the law “continues to represent a serious

threat to internet freedom. Often resulting in pre-trial detention, charges facilitate retaliation for online expression, even in cases that never make it to court”.⁶⁵ During violent riots in the wake of the Indonesian election results announcements, the government also responded by slowing down the internet in Jakarta. A month later during the political unrest in West Papua provinces,



the government even stopped internet access altogether. These policies of reducing or blocking internet access could lead to greater disabling of information sources and could set dangerous precedents for governments to control the online space.

Thailand's extensive surveillance of social media by military surveillance and teams of cyber scouts led to a "shrinking of civic space"⁶⁶ in the context of their competitive elections. Using an amended Computer Crime Act (CCA)⁶⁷, they arrested at least five people on suspicion of sharing falsehoods and endangering national security. The CCA has been used to admonish Future Forward Party leader Thanatorn who faces charges for "uploading false information" after he criticized the junta's efforts to maintain power on Facebook in June 2018. During election season, his deputy leader Pongsakorn Rodchompoo was also accused by the police of violating the CCA. Individuals charged under the CCA face up to five years in prison if convicted.⁶⁸ The military-backed government's tight control of social media and their arbitrary enforcement of the law distorted what was already a highly uneven playing field for political debate and dissent.

In contrast to the two other countries, "fake news" regulation frameworks in the Philippines have been less top-down, though the government has used different state apparatuses to target vocal critics and journalists. One year before the election, the Senate had conducted public hearings that tagged pro-Duterte social media influencers

as the country's "purveyors of fake news".⁶⁹ This name-and-shame approach failed to fully assign responsibility to advertising and PR strategists who are the chief architects of disinformation campaign; senators across the political spectrum were after all complicit in hiring digital campaign strategists from the promotional industries.

Election integrity interventions in these Southeast Asian countries miss out on possibilities of engaging with private industry to enhance self-regulation protocols. India introduced an independent committee to pre-screen political ads in social media and brought together local players in digital marketing to sign a "Voluntary Code of Ethics" promising transparency and cooperation particularly in disclosures around social media advertising.⁷⁰ **United States debates around regulations of influencer marketing and social media advertising can also be instructive, as ethical and legal considerations around micro-targeting ads and influencer collaborations emerged in the Democratic primary races.**⁷¹

It is also abundantly clear that big tech platforms have uneven protocols and guidelines in their social media content moderation practices around elections. Facebook enjoys positive publicity from their takedowns, but without a transparency and accountability framework that invites deliberation around these decisions, they can stand accused of partisanship. Certainly, Facebook's initiative to launch a global oversight committee composed of



third-party experts from the third sector and academia is welcome here as a more inclusive body is better suited to monitor fairness, nonpartisanship, and consistency in processes of content moderation particularly for increasingly polarized nations in Southeast Asia.⁷²

Election Commission campaign regulation

Election commissions are meant to be independent bodies that design and implement rules for both grassroots and media campaigns. We observed that election commissions differed in terms of their scope of responsibility and level of partisanship when applying rules.

Among the three, Thailand's election commission had the most sweeping executive power. The Thai election commission introduced new campaign expenditure regulations that curtailed on-ground grassroots campaigning and justified these measures as anti-vote-buying initiatives. This new regulation hurt opposition parties with more limited opportunities to mobilize working-class communities. Some egregious examples of disinformation by conservative forces targeting the opposition – notably the aforementioned fabrication of a Thaksin-Thanathorn interview broadcast by a broadcast tv channel – also went unchallenged by the election commission. On social media, the election commission also required parties to register their official pages

or be subjected to fines and prison terms. The rules included penalties for sharing or “liking” defamatory content or spreading “false information.” If found in violation, parties could be dissolved and candidates jailed or disqualified from politics.

In the Philippines, the election commission proactively set new guidelines to monitor social media campaigning for the first time to promote principles of transparency and accountability, rather than the more punitive Thai method. It introduced guidelines that increased the reportorial responsibilities of politicians to include expenditure on social media in addition to broadcast media spends in their Statement of Contributions and Expenditures (SOCE). However, this measure has several vulnerabilities, particularly in its extensive focus on the reporting and monitoring of politicians’ official social media accounts, and requirement of attaching official receipts to prove transactions. As discussed in our previous academic report⁷³, **these stringent requirements missed out on capturing targeted Facebook ads, influencer collaborations, and project-based consultancies that lacked formal documentation. This loophole enabled politicians to skirt responsibility to report on informal work arrangements in their digital campaigns.** The current framework also failed to extend political candidates’ responsibility on the content of their digital spends: while politicians are obliged to personally approve TV, radio, and print advertising content, they are not obliged to sign off on social media content produced in their behalf.



Amongst the three countries, the General Elections Commission (KPU) in Indonesia played the least active role in monitoring of social media. The KPU required candidates to register their official social media accounts, but these accounts were rarely the place where disinformation is spread. The Elections Supervisory Body (Bawaslu) is an agency which ostensibly could be more proactive in this area, but as we have shown, **the monitoring of social media has largely fallen on the role of the National Police and their Cyber Unit, along with the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology**, which is where the communications infrastructure allows for such monitoring and reporting. The trend for the Police and Ministry of Communications to handle this area has ultimately meant the State itself is more prominent rather than independent bodies like the KPU or Bawaslu. In late 2019, Bawaslu was encouraging the KPU to have stronger regulations on social media, explaining that there was no detailed rules regarding election campaign violations through social media in any election law, and complained that their function is hampered as election watchdog if the Ministry of Communications is the main authority involved in social media monitoring.⁷⁴

Social media platform bans, takedowns, and third-party fact-checking partnerships

In both Indonesia and the Philippines, Facebook rolled out high-publicity platform bans of networks of pages and accounts

characterized as displaying “inauthentic coordinated behavior.” Three months before the Indonesian election, Facebook took down hundreds of accounts, pages and groups linked to a group called Saracen. The accounts on both Instagram and Facebook were taken down for, according to Facebook, using “fake accounts and frequently posted about local and political news including topics like upcoming elections, alleged election fraud, candidate views, and alleged misconduct of political figures”.⁷⁵ In October 2019 Facebook took down a network of Facebook and Instagram accounts connected to the issue of hostilities in West Papua.⁷⁶ The extensive social media operation of West Papuan “trolls” was exposed a few weeks earlier by a joint investigation between the BBC data analytics researcher and researchers at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.⁷⁷ In these high-profile cases it seems that the hard work of exposing the operations of fake news “factories” and disinformation producers is done by credible journalists and researchers, and Facebook and Twitter then respond.

In the Philippines, Facebook similarly issued press releases for takedowns of inauthentic networks promoting political content. One takedown involved a network of pages operated by clickbait disinformation producers: Twinmark Media Enterprises’ 220 Facebook pages, 73 Facebook accounts, and 29 Instagram accounts were shut down in a platform takedown right before the start of the 2019 campaign season. Facebook identified that Twinmark violated its misrepresentation and spam policies—irrespective of the quality



or trustworthiness of their actual content. Another takedown in the middle of campaign season involved a network of pages operated by Nic Gabunada, who had previously taken credit for Duterte's 2016 campaign. Facebook identified that 200 pages across Facebook and Instagram "frequently posted about local and political news, including topics like the upcoming elections, candidate updates and views, alleged misconduct of political opponents, and controversial events that were purported to occur during previous administrations".⁷⁸

Scholars identify that platform bans are effective measures particularly in preventing manipulative influencers from profiting of hateful content⁷⁹, however it is important that platforms instill greater transparency in the process of identifying "inauthentic coordinated behavior" as well as their decision-making around their publicity of these takedowns in order to neutralize criticisms of partisanship. It's also crucial that Twitter, Google and YouTube are also involved in debates about platform banning and content regulation. The existence of clickbait websites suggests that the Google ad sense model make political news content very financially rewarding, yet Google has been rarely held into account and failed to consistently engage local election commissions and civil society election watchdog groups.

Facebook has also enlisted third-party fact checkers in the three countries, where fact-checkers are provided special access to

their CrowdTangle platform to observe viral content, produce fact-check reports on their news sites, and help Facebook determine which false content should be downvoted (but not banned) from the newsfeed. Scholars debate the efficacy of fact-checking which has a tendency to popularize, or "oxidize", bad content and extend its news cycle further through a well-meaning fact-check.⁸⁰ **Another trend of fact-checking in Asian countries such as India is to become partisan, as "fake news busting" can become weaponized and "follow the patterns of political and ideological fissures".⁸¹ The deeply polarized political climates in the three countries create social environments for blatantly partisan fact-checking of "the other side" could emerge and undermine its central aims.**

Facebook's election integrity initiative in Thailand centered on their high-publicity announcement of a ban on foreign electoral ads.⁸² While some journalists suggest that this move unfairly benefits the incumbent military-backed party, Facebook denies acquiescing to a junta censorship request.



CONCLUSION: REIMAGINING ELECTION INTEGRITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Southeast Asia's experiences with political disinformation in elections caution countries around the world that **so-called "cures" of legislative and police crackdowns could be even worse than the "illness" of disinformation production.** As other cases in the region have shown, laws which oversee social media content can become politicized and partisan, often cracking down on opposition politicians or supporters. It is now largely agreed upon by policymakers in Southeast Asia that social media must be regulated in some way, but crafting careful regulation which targets formalized, paid disinformation production is still a challenge. For the most part, such laws tend to target individual citizens and use them as "examples" to intimidate or silence others. Such government regulation deepens cultures of self-censorship⁸³, facilitate a growing lack of trust in politicians, reduce transparency in governance, inhibit dissent, and exacerbate long-existing inequalities in political participation.

This report has also highlighted the various ways in which state actors themselves are actively involved in disinformation production. Despite regularly declaring themselves as "victims" of online negative campaigning and disinformation production, the state, political parties and politicians

have also increasingly become key funders of the industry, exacerbating the problem, but at the same time arguing for new laws and regulations around social media which ultimately crack down on broader freedom of expression.

Meanwhile, civil society interventions should be careful that they strategically target the disinformation architects leading strategy behind the scenes, rather than waste energy on the laborious fact-checking of every falsehood seeded by attention-seeking influencers. Deliberate falsehoods are sometimes used as by governments as smokescreen to divert public attention from a more sinister political operation or used by influencers to seek prospective clients. **It's also crucial to reflect on the influence of funding models on fact-checking operations: if funded by the government fact-checkers risk being seen as a partisan operation, while platform-sponsored fact-checking often encourages correcting posts of easy targets like ordinary users, as fact-checking political leaders are not currently covered by platforms' fact-checking parameters.**

Clearly, big tech platforms' election integrity initiatives must be adaptive to local contexts. Platforms' policies on content moderation and digital advertising must be sufficiently



guided by knowledge of local political systems and their legislative frameworks as well as the often messy organizational politics of election commissions that seek to monitor social media campaigns. Tech platforms' initiatives to launch election integrity initiatives may increasingly face risks of being co-opted by local stakeholders to advance politically partisan interests.

Moving forward, **it is important to establish multi-stakeholder initiatives to promote greater transparency and accountability in independent election-related online content governance.** Academics, journalists, fact-checkers, election commissions, and advertising and digital marketing industries have opportunities to work openly and collaboratively with tech

platforms in anticipating emergent threats, inform platforms about local features of election campaigns, and free speech regulatory traditions.

By comparing evidence gathered from three of the most digitally connected countries in the world, this report contributes to a more nuanced, regional, and non-EuroAmerican perspective of how we can promote fairness in electoral contests and what issues we can anticipate for online content governance in the global context. It is also an invitation for more transnational comparative research for academics and policymakers to come together and collaboratively lobby tech platforms to attend to challenges emerging from the Southeast Asia region.



Endnotes

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