

Report on Young Policy Leaders Program 2022-2023

# Empowering Civil Society Elements for Countering Post-Truth Politics in the Midst of a Democratic Regression in Contemporary Indonesia



**By Ahmad Khoirul Umam, PhD**

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## Background

After the 2014 general election, 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, and 19 general elections, Indonesia has entered into a new phase of digital democracy. The high ownership of smartphones and more accessible internet access have made social media as a playing field for political battles and campaigns with diverse contents and interests. As a consequence, hoax, fake news, hate speech and character assassinations have become a new normal, which creating socio-political cleavages impacting on the polarized society. In the same time, there are emerging buzzer phenomena which powerfully influence and also manipulate public opinions within the newly democratized society in Indonesia. These situations do not only impact on the political life, but also in the public policies' transparency and account-ability in the country.

To some extent, this increasing trend of digital democracy has been considered as a positive way, especially for the younger generation to be more involved in politics and the process of democratization. However, the negative impact also significantly occurred as the Indonesians' political literacy is considerably low. People in grassroots level seems to be incapable to distinguished between true and false information spreading in social media, which gradually cripple the pillars of democracy.

The situation is getting worse when the digital democracy is not supported by the clear regulation, especially in the midst of democratic regression in Indonesia. As a consequence, people are afraid to express their voices and opinions against those in power through various platforms. The political fear is getting more widely spreading as the ruling power uses the Law on Electronic Information and Transaction (UU ITE) to target critical social elements.

Despite this situation, Indonesia's younger generation still believes in democratic values. Student movements, independent media workers, activists, and other civil society elements are part of the healthiest pillars of democracy in the country. As a digital-savvy generation, it is essential to equip them with the more necessary and deeper knowledge of digital democracy, big data analysis capacity, and social media content management to create solutions for countering post-truth politics in the newly politically liberal-ized Indonesia. This attempt will be more important and relevant, as in the next two years, Indonesia will conduct the 2024 legislative, presidential and local leader elections.

Therefore, Paramadina Public Policy Institute (PPPI) conducted the course program on countering hoaxes and social media content



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management as essential to prepare the young generation to be the more critical and liberal agents of democracy.

## Objective

- Our mission is to promote the more healthy and liberal democracy by eliminating post-truth politics which is getting stronger and more influential within the newly liberalized Indonesia.
- To improve the digital literacy among young potential leaders to neutralize the capacity of hoaxes, fake news and hate speech in so-cial media in Indonesia.
- To provide analytic skills and also social media content management among young potential leaders to generate knowledge and to counter post-truth politics in Indonesia's democracy.



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## Public Discussions and

PPPI has conducted three rounds of public discussion. The first round was conducted in the morning on Saturday, 17 December 2022, while the second round was conducted in the afternoon on Saturday, 17 December 2022. The forums involved young participants from 20-30 years old from various youth and grassroots generation, representing political journalists, NGO activists, moderate Islamic based-civil societies, executive board of university students around Jakarta and pro-democracy think tank's young researchers.

**SABTU 17 DESEMBER 09:45:12:30 WIB**  
Ruang Cordova  
Universitas Paramadina  
Jl. Gatot Subroto Km 97  
Mampang, Jakarta

**CIPE**  
paramadina public policy institute

**Young Policy Leaders Program 2022**

**SESI 1:**  
**Evaluasi Dinamika Demokrasi Indonesia & Political Outlook 2023**

**SESI 2:**  
**Training for Creative Products of Social Media Contents to Counter Hoax**

Join Zoom Meeting  
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Informasi lebih lanjut: 0895-1930-7479  
email: [policy.paramadina.ac.id](mailto:policy.paramadina.ac.id)

In the first round, we invited Dr. Mahmud Syaltout and Dr. Abdul Malik Gisamar who had expertise and experience on democratization and cyber space issues in contemporary Indonesia. In the same time, the forum also elaborated the Big Data Analysis and the use of social media data analysis for understanding the mapping of hoaxes, alliance of buzzers and influencers in the current Indonesian political environment. By exercising these approaches, we could understand the recent practice and seeing the real political conversation phenomenon in social media.



Meanwhile in the second round, we invited Rio Satriyo Hadiwijoyo, M.Ds and Rian Dwi Antoro, M.Sn, who have capacity and capability for design-ing and art training to equip participants for creating creative digital prod-ucts to participate in countering hoaxes, fake news, hate speech, and pro-moting democratic values among young Indonesians, especially those in Jakarta and its surroundings.



Meanwhile in the third round, PPPI conducted another public discussion on democracy & disinformation which was conducted on Wednesday, 25 January 2023. In this occasion, we invited Dr. Agus Sudiby, member of National Press Council (Dewan Pers Republik Indonesia), Dr. Ismail Fahmi, the expert of Big Data, and also Septa Dinata, M.Si, one of the PPPI's researchers to uncover the root of disinformation weakening contemporary Indonesian democracy.

**Young Policy Leaders Program** universitas paramadina paramadina public policy institute CIPE

Paramadina Democracy Forum (PDF) Seri ke-6

**Demokrasi dan Disinformasi: Peluang dan Tantangan Mewujudkan Kebebasan Berpendapat yang Akuntabel dalam Tahun Politik**

**Dr. Agus Sudiby**  
Pakar Digital Media & Anggota Dewan Pers

**Dr. Ismail Fahmi**  
Pakar Big Data dan Pendiri Drone Emprit

**Septa Dinata, M.Si.**  
Dosen Sosiologi Universitas Paramadina & Peneliti PPPI

Hybrid  
Perpustakaan Universitas Paramadina  
Zoom: [bit.ly/PPPI-PDF6](https://bit.ly/PPPI-PDF6)

Rabu, 25 Januari 2023  
Pukul 12.00 WIB

**Mishka Husen Balfas M.Sos**  
Moderator



In this forum, we also invited young participants consisted of political journalists, NGO activists, moderate Islamic based-civil societies, and also pro-democracy think tank in Jakarta and surrounds. Dr. Agus Sudibyo, Dr. Ismail Fahmi, and Septa Dinata, M.Si elaborated further the quality of contemporary Indonesia's digital democracy flooded by hoax and post-truth politics. As the expert of Big Data, Dr. Ismail Fahmi tutoring the participants in using open-source social media analytic to analyze the public opinion in digital space by using big data. This was a hands-on experience for participants to conduct the big data analysis. We identified and understood the complexity of the political cleavage trend based on the identity-based polarization which have been extremely exploited by political actors in the country. These efforts were expected to provide adequate understanding for the youth to strengthen their political literacy as part of the attempts to empower the future of Indonesia's democracy.

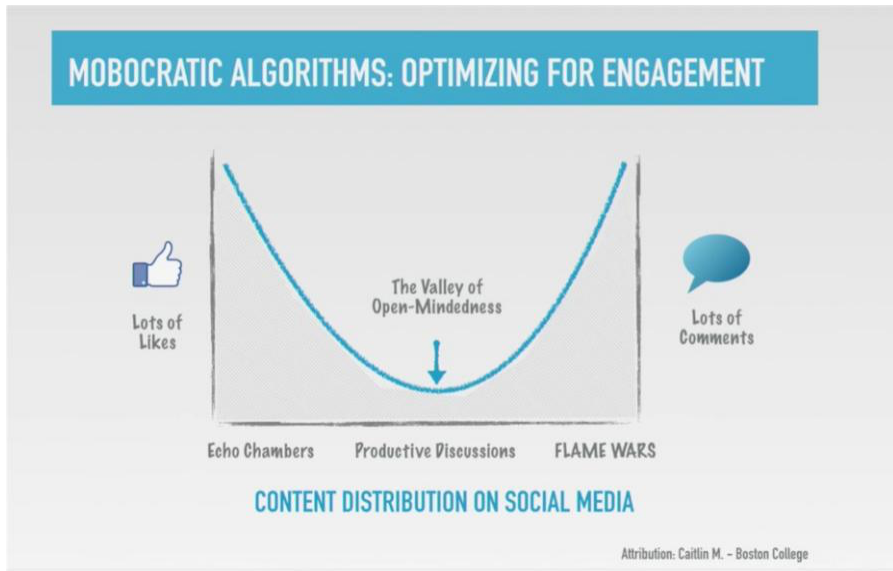
## Highlighted Issues

During the program, the participants were also guided to conduct mini-research by formulating literature review and running Social Network Analysis (SNA) to identify hoax, fake news, hate speech and character assassinations generating political polarization and exploitation of political identity in Indonesia. The participants were encouraged to get some highlighted issues as part of the preliminary findings of the program. Some highlighted issues as follows:

1. We identified that “disinformation-for-profit business model” has become a pattern in the digital business environment. Based on Dr. Ismail Fahmi and Dr. Mahmud Syaltout's observation, it is evident that the logic in the recommendation systems on Twitter and Facebook makes it easier for controversial news to spread faster than the true news. On Twitter up to 6x faster, which is supposedly left to the needs of business profit orientation. At the same time, it turns out that the model generated by algorithm makes the behavior of sharing disinformation much easier to do, than the behavior of seeking and spreading the truth. Bias against disinformation is more severe than against truth. Because disinformation fuels controversy, generates attention, and pays huge dividends to the digital or social media platforms. The more biased, the more profitable. It means that social medias have fundamental problems as social medias are designed to favor, in which the broadcasting over engagement, discussions over posts, and shallow comments over deep conversations. As a result, the nature of social media results in a deep polarization and potentially stimulating civil war. To understand more clearly, please see the picture attached below:



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- 2.
3. On the other hand, as empathized by Dr. Ahmad Khoirul Umam and Dr. Abdul Malik Gismar, democratic regression in Indonesia has become serious concern during the last three to five years. Critical perspectives have been produced and widely spread among the people that democratization in the post-Reform Indonesia era has been already out of controlled, creating political chaos and instability, and unable to produce good governance and liberal political-economic changes because of fragmentation of Oligarchy networks both in national and local levels. As a result, on behalf of the pro stability-based economic development policy approach, the pillars of democracy, civil liberties and anti-corruption measures have been systematically weakened.
4. Furthermore, Dr. Agus Sudibyo and Septa Dinata, MSi highlighted that the symptoms have begun when people are inclined to be afraid and worried to express their critical opinions against political elites and high-ranking state officials, for subsequently being criminalized by using several rubber articles in the Law on Information and Electronic Transactions (UU ITE No. 19/2016). The critical civil society elements' privacies can also be systematically destroyed through illegal wiretapping, hijacking personal accounts, doxing, and other ways violating human right principles.
5. Meanwhile, pro-government buzzers and influencers seem to enjoy the free space to express their opinions to attack rivals and oppositions or non-government outsiders, without worrying about being victimized by the law enforcement system. As a result, the tsunami of disinformation in the form of hoaxes, fake news, hate



speeches and character assassinations extremely flooded Indonesian democratic environment. On the other hand, the wave of dis-information also exploits identity politics in which the war among religious and nationalism-based ideologies have been so stronger. As a result, the pattern of post-truth politics and public opinion manipulation is getting deeply-entrenched within democratic environment.

6. This condition drives those in the circle of power take more advantage to secure their power by using the state's powerful instruments. As a result, the return of authoritarian political architecture can be clearly seen from the gradual return of the military's role in public offices, the efforts to extend the president's terms violating constitution, and also the postponement of the simultaneous regional elections in 271 of 542 regions in 2024 which are now totally but unaccountably controlled by the central government. In the same time, efforts to strengthen the hegemony of power can also be identified by the many smuggled laws and regulations such as the Law on the KPK, Omnibus Law on Job Creation, the Law on New Capital City, brought in the dark space of power which were finally legalized despite the very strong opposition from the people, university students and other civil society elements across the nation.

## Example of Case Studies

Overall, we identified that there are many major narrative topics of political polarization fueled by hoax, fake news, and hate speech deepening democratic regression in Indonesia. In this case, we tried to cover two major issues indicating the decaying democratic and anti-corruption pillars in Indonesia which must be secured for the better future of Indonesia's democracy.

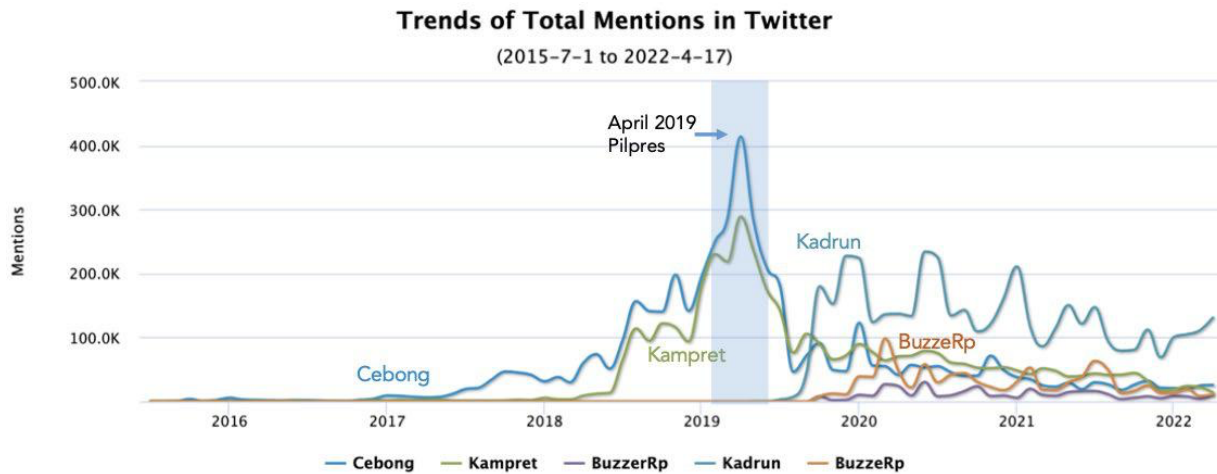
### 1. Political polarization in the post 2014 election: "Cebong" Versus "Kampret"

The tradition of referring to netizen groups by a certain name was started by the call "Cebong" (tadpole) from Indonesia's Presidential Candidate Prabowo Subiyanto's supporters towards the elected President Joko Widodo's supporters since August 2015. Meanwhile, the term of "Kampret" (Bat) was a response to the call "tadpole" appeared in October 2015. Whereas "tadpoles" live in water, "bat" live in trees upside down. Calls for "cebong" and "kampret" reached their peak in April 2019, namely during the 2019 Indonesian presidential election. Furthermore, the term of "kadrun" was first coined by @Manuputty1101 in January 2018. It only became more popular after the presidential election after @Dennysiregar7

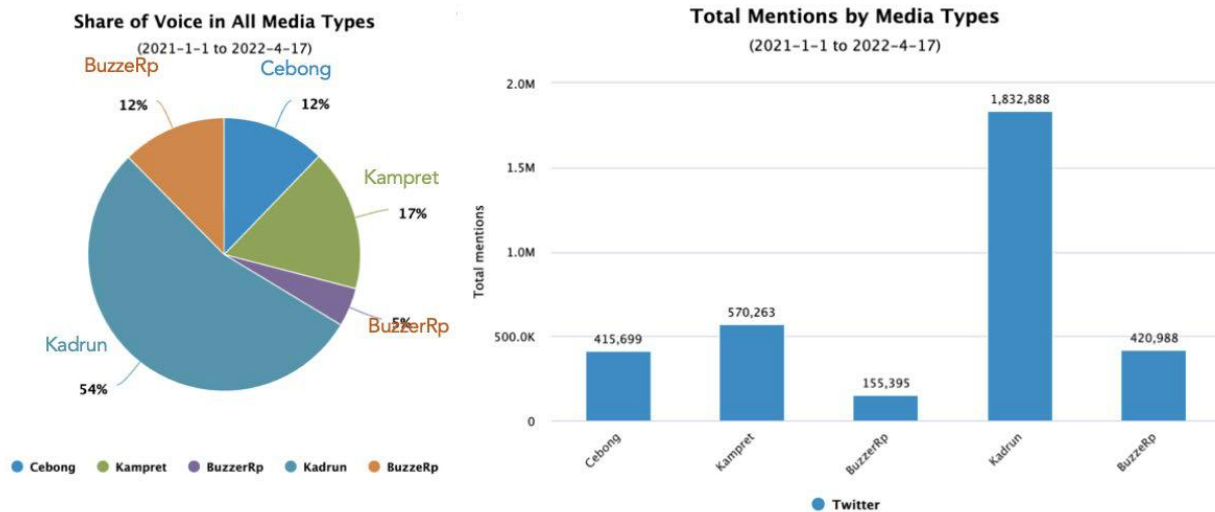


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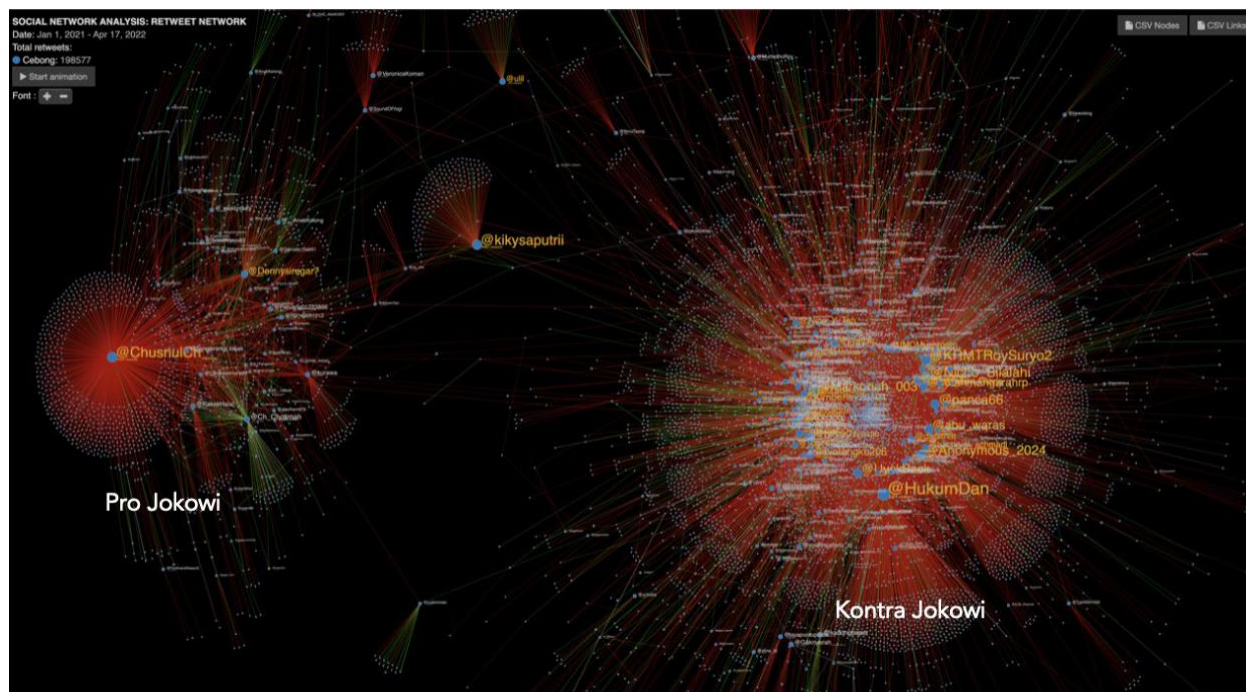
mentioned "Kadal Gurun"(Desert Lizard) which means “Islamists” in August 2019, which his supporters shortened to be "Kadrun". Based on the data observation guided by Dr. Ismail Fahmi, we found the trend of total mentions in twitter during the last seven years as follows:



Meanwhile the volume of the calls representing strong political polarization during the last one year as follows:



Meanwhile the social network analysis to understand how is the complexity of the public conversation in digital media platform, representing how Joko Widodo's supporters and anti -Joko Widodo alliances dominates Indonesian digital space conversation during the last one year as follows:



In this context, the political polarization during the last seven years has used religious-based political identity exploitation. We know that In-donesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, is a diverse and plu-ralistic nation with various ethnicities, religions, and cultures. The country has long been praised for its tolerance and harmony between different groups. However, the social network analysis above have shown that In-donesia has been experiencing acute political polarization due to the ex-ploitation of political identity by various actors.

One of the main identity-based narratives that have been exploited in Indonesian politics is the Islamist versus Pancasila narratives. Pancasila is the state ideology of Indonesia, which emphasizes the principles of na-tional unity, democracy, social justice, and religious diversity. On the other hand, Islamist ideology has been accused as aimed to establish an Islamic state based on Islamic law or shariah. That accusation could be true for some reasons, but also could be seriously misleading when it is used in political contestation.

The exploitation of political identity in Indonesia is not a new phenomenon, but it has become more acute in recent years. The nationalists accused Muslim political groups are not part of Indonesia as they were depicted as anti-five pillars called Pancasila which was formulated by Indonesian founding fathers. Meanwhile, Islamist groups then used various tactics to exploit the Islamist narrative, including organizing mass rallies, mobilizing their supporters, and launching smear campaigns against Jokowi and his government. They also exploited the issue of blasphemy to attack the government and other individuals who they deemed to be anti-Islam. These debates were never been open for mutual and equal dialogues. This led to the rise of a new wave of intolerance and religious extremism and also hyper-nationalist's political maneuver in Indonesia, which threatened the country's unity and stability.

The exploitation of political identity has created a deep division in Indonesian society, where people are increasingly identifying themselves based on their religion or ethnicity rather than their nationality. This has also led to the rise of sectarianism and intolerance, where people from different religious and nationalist backgrounds are often suspicious of each other and sometimes even engage in violent conflicts.

In conclusion, the exploitation of political identity using the Islam-ist versus Pancasila narrative has created acute political polarization in Indonesia. It has deepened the divisions in Indonesian society and threatened the country's unity and stability. The government and civil society should work together to promote the values of Pancasila and counter the narrative of sectarianism and intolerance. They should also address the root causes of the exploitation of political identity, including socio-economic disparities and political exclusion, to create a more inclusive and tolerant society.

## **2. Weakening the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) By Exploiting Hoax and Fake News**

In recent years, Indonesia has been facing a crisis of corruption, which has weakened its democracy and hindered its economic development. To tackle this issue, the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) was established in 2002. KPK is an independent state agency that is responsible for investigating and prosecuting corruption cases. Since its establishment, KPK has been successful in prosecuting high-profile corruption cases, including those involving politicians, government officials, and business people.

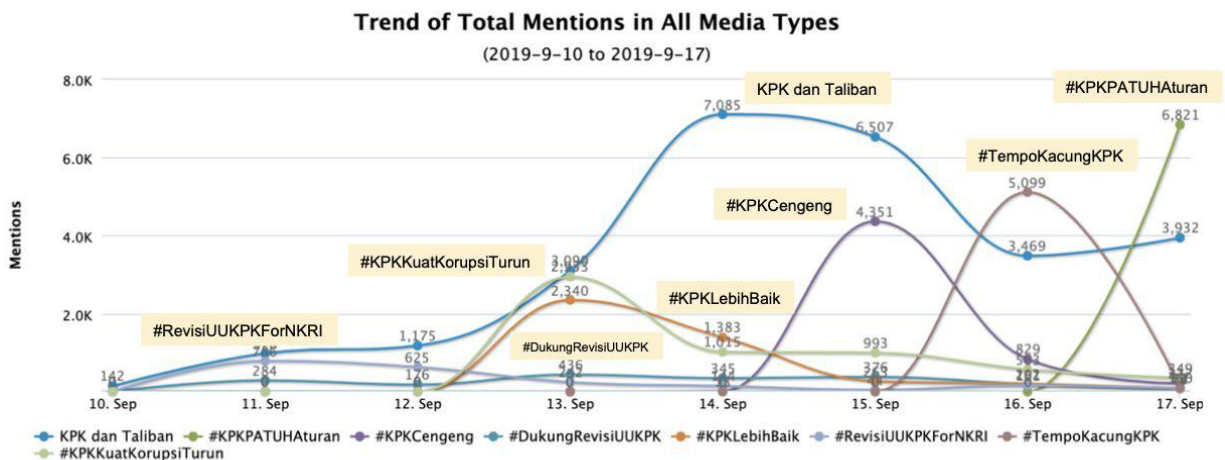
However, in recent years, KPK has faced increasing pressure and attacks from various groups, particularly from politicians and their allies. In 2019, the Indonesian parliament passed an amendment to the KPK

Law, which many critics believe will weaken the agency's effectiveness and independence. This article will discuss the hidden political operation to weaken KPK through the amendment of KPK Law.

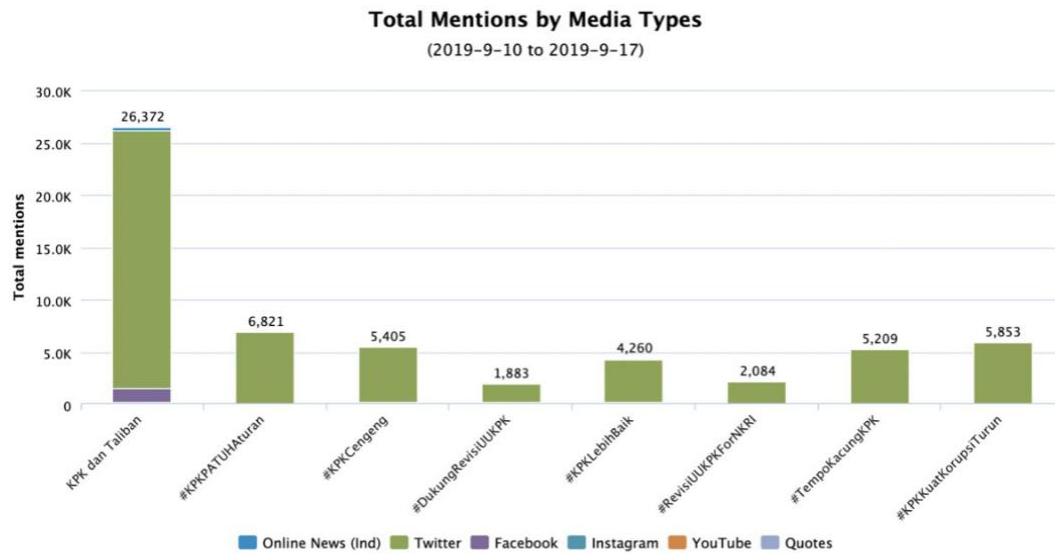
The amendment of KPK Law was not an isolated incident but rather a part of a hidden political operation that aimed to weaken the agency's power and independence. This political operation involved various actors, including politicians, government officials, and business people. These actors have used various tactics to discredit KPK and weaken its legitimacy, including the use of hoaxes, fake news, and political identity exploitation.

One of the tactics used to discredit KPK was the spread of hoaxes and fake news about the agency. These hoaxes and fake news aimed to create a negative image of KPK and undermine its legitimacy. For example, some hoaxes suggested that KPK was a tool of foreign intelligence agencies and that it was working to destabilize the government. Such hoaxes were widely spread through social media, particularly by pro-government groups and politicians.

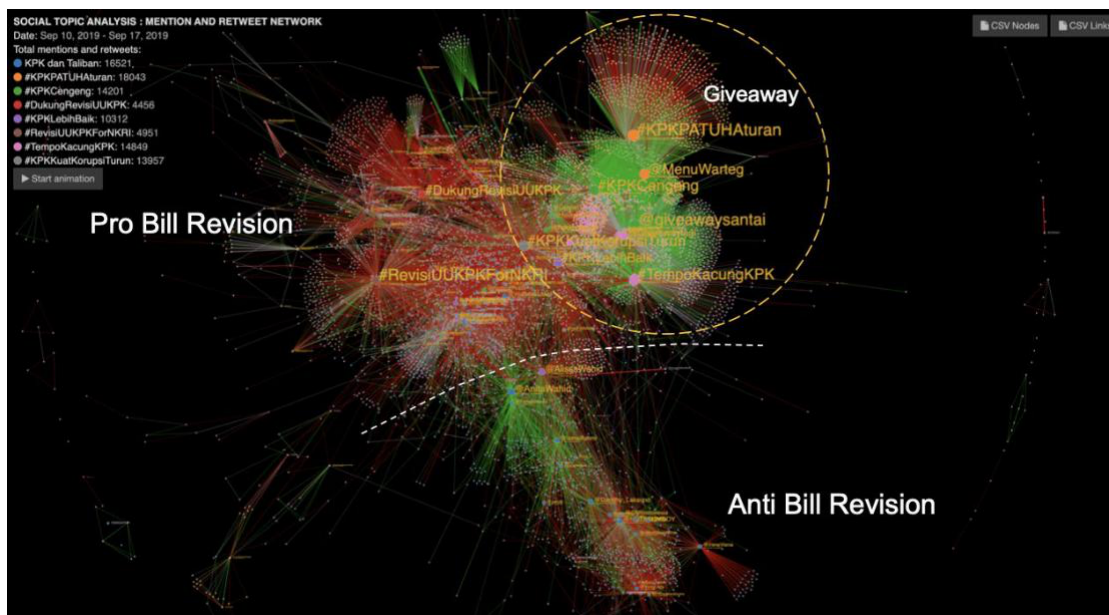
Another tactic used to weaken KPK was the exploitation of political identity, particularly by framing the agency as anti-Islam and anti-Pan-casila (the state ideology of Indonesia). This narrative aimed to polarize public opinion and create divisions between those who support KPK and those who oppose it. Pro-government groups and politicians have used this narrative to paint KPK as a threat to Indonesia's national unity and stability. The data below shows how the “paid buzzers” kept maintain their political operation to weaken the KPK’s credibility and also public trust to the KPK itself. See the data below:



Furthermore, some politicians and the “paid buzzers” have also accused KPK of being a "Taliban cell" that aims to create instability in the country. This narrative aimed to appeal to the conservative Muslim population and frame KPK as a threat to Islam. In contrast, other politicians have accused KPK of being a tool of the old regime, which aimed to undermine the reform agenda and the spirit of Pancasila. Based on the data below, we could understand how these narratives were very effective to cripple public trust to the KPK.



Meanwhile the social network analysis on the controversial issues on the weakening KPK’s capacity can be seen in the picture below:



Based on the data above, we could understand well how destructive the anti-democratic moves in weakening democracy and anti-corruption pillars in Indonesia. The hidden political operation to weaken KPK has had a severe impact on the agency's effectiveness and independence. The amendment of KPK Law has been criticised by many as a significant setback in the fight against corruption. The new law has reduced the power of KPK to wiretap and search suspects without a warrant, which has been a critical tool in investigating corruption cases.

Moreover, the political operation has also affected KPK's public image and legitimacy. The spread of hoaxes and fake news has created confusion and mistrust among the public about the agency's work. The exploitation of political identity has also created divisions and polarization in society, which has hindered the fight against corruption.

In short, the hidden political operation to weaken KPK through the amendment of KPK Law has been a severe setback for Indonesia's democracy and the fight against corruption. The use of hoaxes, fake news, and political identity exploitation to discredit KPK has undermined the agency's legitimacy and effectiveness. To overcome this challenge, it is essential to raise public awareness of the hidden political operation and the need to protect KPK's independence and effectiveness.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

In recent years, Indonesia has seen a rise in the phenomenon of post-truth politics, where facts and truth are disregarded in favor of emotionally charged rhetoric, fake news, and hate speech. This phenomenon is fueled by the rampant spread of hoaxes and fake news through social media platforms and messaging apps, which have become the primary source of information for many Indonesians.

Post-truth politics has a profound impact on Indonesia's democracy. It undermines public trust in institutions and erodes the credibility of the media, making it increasingly challenging to hold those in power accountable. This trend has also led to the emergence of a highly polarized political landscape, where political actors rely on identity politics, religious and ethnic tensions, and populist rhetoric to mobilize support.

To address this problem, efforts to improve political literacy and democratic awareness are crucial. Political literacy is the ability to understand and critically analyze political issues and the democratic process. It involves the ability to evaluate sources of information and identify propaganda, hoaxes, and fake news.



In recent years, Indonesia has seen a rise in the phenomenon of post-truth politics, where facts and truth are disregarded in favor of emotionally charged rhetoric, fake news, and hate speech.

To improve political literacy, several initiatives have been taken, including through the Young Policy Leaders Program supported by the CIPE. During this program, we introduced kind of civic education programs for the youth, journalists, and also civil society activists to rise up our collective awareness to save democracy. The program was aimed to provide individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in the democratic process actively.

However, there are several challenges in implementing these programs. One of the biggest challenges is the lack of political will and also support from the political stakeholders, including the law or regulation enforcement authorities to stop the spread of hoax, fake news, hate speech and also character assassination through digital media platform. Another challenge is the limited access to information and media literacy resources in many parts of Indonesia, particularly in rural areas. Therefore, similar program are needed and should be done in some major cities of Indonesia to spread the same awareness to save Indonesia's democracy.

Moreover, the spread of fake news and hate speech is not limited to social media platforms. Mainstream media outlets are also guilty of spreading false information and sensationalized news. This phenomenon is known as "clickbait journalism," where news outlets prioritize click rates and advertising revenue over journalistic integrity.

To combat this problem, media literacy programs are also essential to provide individuals with the tools to evaluate the credibility of news sources and identify sensationalized or misleading news. Moreover, media outlets need to prioritize accuracy and objectivity over profit and advertising revenue.

In conclusion, the rise of post-truth politics in Indonesia is a significant challenge for democracy in the country. Addressing this challenge requires a comprehensive effort to improve political literacy and democratic awareness among the public, journalists, and civil society organizations. By doing so, we can promote a more informed and responsible democratic process and counter the spread of hoaxes, fake news, and hate speech in Indonesia.



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