

PERSPECTIVE

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Fake News and Increased Persecution in Indonesia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Between January and June 2017, 59 cases of persecution against alleged critics of Islam and the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) were reported in Indonesia.
- The diversity of those targeted though suggest that these persecution cases are not necessarily motivated by religious or ethnic sentiments, but may be protection rackets hiding behind sectarian banners.
- ‘Fake news’ is being used by these groups to aggravate sectarian tensions and feelings of alienation.
- The new media industry that favours sensational headlines, a highly unequal material-technological distribution, and the rapid expansion of formal education and associated unemployment among educated young people enhance the effectiveness of fake news.

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INTRODUCTION

In May and June 2017, a 40-year-old Muslim woman working as a state hospital physician in West Sumatra had her workplace and home stormed by dozens of alleged members of the FPI (Front Pembela Islam/Islam Defender Front). She was threatened and intimidated—accused as an *ulama* (religious leader)-slandering *pelacur* (whore) and a Communist—for posting a status on Facebook that criticised Habib Rizieq Shihab, leader of the FPI. For safety reasons, legal aid moved her to Jakarta. A 15-year-old boy of Chinese descent in Jakarta had his house stormed at midnight, was dragged outside and beaten for making comments insulting Rizieq and the FPI, and then forced to sign a statement of apology by a group of people claiming to be members of the FPI. The family’s legal press release stated that there were more than 100 people involved, and that the family had been ejected by their landlord for fear of his house being stormed again. The boy’s mother, a widow, lost her job because her workplace had similar fears.

The physician had written on her Facebook: why, despite Rizieq’s statement that he had the support of more than 700 lawyers and millions of Muslims, does he continue hiding in Saudi Arabia, avoiding a police summons regarding pornography allegations? She was referring to the alleged exchanges of sexually explicit chats and nude photos between Rizieq Shihab and his non-marital partner, Firza Husein, which went viral on the internet early this year.¹ After an official report was filed with the police, on 30 May 2017, the Jakarta Police declared that they had gathered enough evidence to classify Rizieq as a suspect under Indonesia’s notorious anti-pornography law and Information and Electronic Transaction (ITE) law.

Happening all over Indonesia, the boy and physician were only two of at least 59 people who have been reported undergoing *persekusi* (persecution)² since January 2017. These persecutions have been reported as an “Ahok effect” since they have visibly increased in May, i.e. the month when the former governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), was convicted.³ Ahok’s high-profile case has led many to caution against rising sectarianism and Islamist and anti-Chinese identity politics.⁴ Analysts have warned that too much emphasis on identity politics provokes alarmism in the media and the public, and can obscure and perpetuate rising socio-economic divides.⁵ Indeed, Indonesia has had a long

¹ For an English-language discussion of the charges, see “Morality versus the law: Rizieq Shihab on the defensive,” *Indonesia at Melbourne* 1 June 2017 <http://indonesiaatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au/morality-versus-the-law-rizieq-shihab-on-the-defensive/> (accessed 1 June 2017).

² The Indonesianised English words “*hoaks*” (hoax) and “*persekusi*” (persecution) have become frequently used only within the past year.

³ As reported by the Southeast Asia Freedom Network (SAFENet) coordinator, Damar Juniarto. See “The Ahok Effect, Warga Agresif Buru ‘Penista Agama’” *CNN Indonesia* 27 May 2017 <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20170527151727-20-217678/the-ahok-effect-warga-agresif-buru-penista-agama/> (accessed 5 June 2017).

⁴ For an overview, see Charlotte Setijadi, “Ahok’s Downfall and the Rise of Islamist Populism in Indonesia,” *ISEAS Perspective* no. 38, 8 June 2017.

⁵ Ian Wilson, “Jakarta: inequality and the poverty of elite pluralism,” *New Mandala* 19 April 2017 <http://www.newmandala.org/jakarta-inequality-poverty-elite-pluralism/> (accessed 3 June 2017);

history of complex interplay between class and ethno-religious identities, with real and dire consequences to both ethnic-religious minorities and precarious class-groups. The recent high-profile blasphemy case against Ahok, along with these *persekusi* cases, should thus be seen as part of a long historical build-up that has allowed the concepts of “diversity” and “pluralism” to be manipulated, exacerbated by the lack of robust legal, security, and education reforms.⁶ Analysing recent “fake news” and persecution cases, I sketch out the legal and historical contexts that have afforded their inroads: the notorious so-called “rubber laws” and long-neglected legal-security reforms; the rapid but highly uneven spread of technology; and the expansion in quantity but not quality of formal education.

RUBBERY LAWS AND ENFORCEMENT

Indonesian laws and institutions are infamous for being fragmented and outdated; many fundamental laws remained unaltered from the colonial or war period, and are considered antiquated and unsuitable for contemporary conditions.⁷ The country has only one law governing cyberspace: Law no. 11/2008 on the Information and Electronic Transaction (ITE), recently revised in Law no. 19/2016.⁸ This piece of legislation is notorious for being used by political and business leaders to silence critics (including journalists, researchers, civilians), with many prosecutions taking place in the context of defamation suits and pornography.⁹ Indonesia also has its own “anti-pornography” Law no. 44/2008. Both laws are controversial for their “*pasal karet* (rubber articles)” — simply put, they contain many extendable and ambiguous terms such as “pornography” and “defamation” that can be stretched and deployed by anyone against anyone.

Those worn out by FPI’s serial racketeering may delight in what seemed like “tit for tat” karma: that Rizieq could be charged with the controversial law that he and the FPI had agitated for. Yet considering Indonesia’s notoriously rubbery laws and enforcement, these charges might backfire. After all, Rizieq had already been imprisoned twice for inciting

see also Rita Padawangi, “The Invisibility of the Urban Poor in Jakarta,” *Asian Urbanism* 20 June 2017 <http://blog.nus.edu.sg/ariurban/2017/06/20/the-invisibility-of-the-poor/> (accessed 23 June 2017).

⁶ Ulla Fionna, “Manipulating “Diversity”: Campaign against Ahok Threatens Democracy,” *ISEAS Perspective* no. 6, 2 February 2017.

⁷ For a thorough discussion, see Naoyuki Sakumoto & Hikmahanto Juwana, *Reforming Laws and Institutions in Indonesia: An Assessment*, Jakarta: University of Indonesia & IDE-JETRO, 2007.

⁸ The revised Law no. 19/2016 has the sentence reduced, and an article on “the right to be forgotten” added, but it retains many of its problems. See also Usman Hamid, “Laws, crackdowns and control mechanisms: digital platforms and the state,” *Digital Indonesia: Connectivity and Divergence*, Singapore: ISEAS 2017.

⁹ Some examples are the homemade sex videos of three Indonesian celebrities in 2010. More recently, a female high school teacher was subjected to frequent lewd phone calls from the headmaster. The records were copied and spread to her colleagues by her friend who borrowed her mobile phone, and soon became widespread. The ashamed headmaster fired and reported her to the police using the ITE Law, and she has been detained since. Her husband also lost her job. See “Terjerat UU ITE, Ibu Tiga Anak Mendekam di Penjara,” *Kompas.com* 9 May 2017 <http://regional.kompas.com/read/2017/05/09/19513361/terjerat.uu.ite.ibu.tiga.anak.mendekam.di.penjara> (accessed 23 June 2017).

hatred, and according to Wilson, “If the political goal is to nullify the FPI, then it’s a serious miscalculation . . . Each time he’s spent time in jail, the organization has grown, the martyrdom complex has grown, as has the perception that he is someone who is willing to sacrifice for the cause.”¹⁰ Considering Indonesia’s long-stalled legal and security reforms, along with its proven track record of being easily swayed by public pressure and/or political maneuvers, there is a fair chance that the FPI could win¹¹—giving them even more legitimacy and one more public relations victory.

Additionally, and underneath this high-profile drama, aggressive efforts to hunt down and persecute social media users who criticize Rizieq and the FPI—such as the ones described in the introduction—have also increased. These hunting efforts typically proceed in four systematic steps: (1) tracing and listing social media accounts; (2) publishing instructions to hunt listed targets along with their personal data (including photographs and home or workplace addresses); (3) storming the target’s workplace or home; (4) taking and reporting the target to the police using the very same ITE Law.

Grey Protection Rackets

On top of these rubbery laws and enforcement, throughout Indonesia’s modern history the distinction between state and non-state actors carrying out legitimate violence and coercion has not been clear cut.¹² Extortion and harassment by street-level thugs, gangs, and militias—often lumped together as *preman*—are a ubiquitous part of everyday life. Often caricatured as violent hardliner thugs without any redeeming qualities, *preman* (literally, “free man”) have a complex history.¹³ During the New Order, they had a symbiotic, sometimes violent, relationship with Suharto’s regime. They were subcontracted as quasi-official gangsters to stimulate fear and run protection rackets, and operated with near-legal impunity on the condition that a proportion of their bounty was shared with the state.¹⁴

¹⁰ “Hard-Line Moralist in Indonesia Faces Pornography Charges,” *The New York Times*, 30 May 2017 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/30/world/asia/rizieq-shihab-pornography.html> (accessed 31 May 2017).

¹¹ Rizieq and his legal authorities have continued denying the charges, questioning the legal procedures, the authenticity of the evidence, and the breach to their “right to privacy”. The Interpol has also rejected the request to issue its red notice (similar to international arrest warrant) by the Jakarta police. “Police Put Investigation Into Rizieq Shihab's Pornography Case on Hold,” *Jakarta Globe* 21 June 2017, <http://countmein.thejakartaglobe.com/news/police-put-investigation-rizieq-shihabs-pornography-case-hold/> (accessed 21 June 2017)

¹² For a discussion on violence and its relation to state and non-state actors, see Benedict Anderson (ed.), *Violence and the State in Suharto's Indonesia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.

¹³ Derived from the Dutch *vrijman*, these days, *preman* is increasingly used to specifically refer to individuals who use violent and coercive strategies to achieve material reward, an “entrepreneur of violence”. Yet up until the 1980s, *preman* referred specifically to military officers out of uniform (Ryter 1998). See Ian Wilson’s comprehensive study, *The Politics of Protection Rackets in Post-New Order Indonesia: Coercive Capital, Authority and Street Politics*, London & New York: Routledge, 2015.

¹⁴ These relationships were unstable, and could change overtime. During the New Order they were more dependent on networks of political patronage, more under a metaphorical “leash”, and there have been times where *preman* as the hunter became the hunted when they crossed their patron. This was infamously demonstrated in the case of Petrus (literally an abbreviation of “mysterious

After the fall of the New Order in 1998, and without any significant security and military reform,¹⁵ competition for resources and influence in the grey areas protection rackets has continued unabated. There has even been “a discernible increase in *premanisme*”,¹⁶ allowing a new breed of *preman* to organise along ethnic and religious lines, with relatively more autonomy than its New Order predecessor. The involvement of various individuals and organisations (with different banners: ethnic, religious, student, etc.) also makes investigating and tracing *preman* lines of command much harder. The FPI—long known for their street-level thuggery in the name of religious piety and anti-vice morality—is only one group among many.¹⁷

The *persekusi* cases mentioned above also indicate that the FPI members and sympathisers have grown savvy in using digital media to systematically identify and harass those they disagree with, both online and offline. Though emboldened by the recent opening that has allowed them to mobilise significant masses in the November and December 2016 rallies, the FPI are not newcomers to this kind of racketeering politics and thuggery. They have directed malicious threats and violence against vulnerable minority groups, such as the Ahmadiyah sects, Batak Christians, and the LGBTQ community, while anything approaching criticism against them (or their allies) is maligned as communist, atheist, “anti-Pancasila”, and even “liberal”.

To understand these ideological issues, one should remember that labeling anything or anyone as “communist” has for decades been the go-to method of attack in Indonesia, a place where communism is still illegal. More recently, it has been hurled against wide-ranging individuals, from a hijab-wearing Muslim physician, to a Chinese woman mayoral

shooters”) affair in the 1980s, where at least 7,000 of those suspected as *preman* were extra-judicially murdered—for “shock therapy,” as Suharto icily wrote on his memoir. See Benedict R. Anderson, ‘Impunity and Reenactment: Reflections on the 1965 Massacre in Indonesia and Its Legacy’, *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 11.15 No. 4 (2013); Robert Cribb, “From Petrus to Ninja: Death Squads in Indonesia”, *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability*, ed. by Arthur D. Brenner and Bruce B. Campbell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

¹⁵ Particularly since it continued to allow the grey illicit area of competition for resources and influence among the police (directly positioned under the president without any ministry), the military (withdrawn from formal politics, but still deeply entrenched within the territorial command networks), and non-state specialists of violence. See *The Expanding Role of the Indonesian Military*, IPAC Report (Jakarta: Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, 2015) and its *Update* (2016); Mietzner, Marcus, and Lisa Misol, ‘Military Businesses in Post-Suharto Indonesia: Decline, Reform and Persistence’, in *The Politics of Military Reform: Experiences from Indonesia and Nigeria*, ed. by Jurgen Ruland, Maria-Gabriela Manea, and Hans Born (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2012), pp. 101–20.

¹⁶ See Ian Wilson, “‘As Long as It’s Halal’: Islamic Preman in Jakarta’, in *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), pp. 192–210.

¹⁷ Other examples include Front Betawi Rempug, also discussed in depth by Wilson (2015), or Front Umat Islam.

candidate,¹⁸ to Ahok and Jokowi.¹⁹ There were some signs that this political taboo was gradually eroding in late 2015 and early 2016,²⁰ and that other disparate but more contemporary taboos such as “LGBTQ” and “liberal” had become more salient. While the attempt to deploy these taboos created a lot of media headlines, their capacity to mobilize the public was nevertheless limited. However, Ahok’s fatal quoting of the Koran, widely spread in various doctored versions through social and mass media in mid-2016, gave a vital opening for a high-profile attack strategy utilizing a “defend Islam” bulwark.²¹

Media manipulation amidst highly unequal material-technological development

To fend off the spread of fake news, early this year the national press council implemented barcode verification for online media, and an “anti-hoax” society was launched, while calls for “digital media literacy” programs have increased.²² Yet like many “young democracy” countries in Southeast Asia, press institutions in Indonesia are often young and weak

¹⁸ Hui Yew-Foong, “Decentralization and Chinese Indonesian Politics: The Case of Singkawang, West Kalimantan,” *ISEAS Perspective* no. 19, 27 March 2017.

¹⁹ Jokowi has been repeatedly framed as a Communist; as a member of the PKI, which was completely annihilated in 1965—when Jokowi was barely four years old; that his biological parents were members of the PKI and that he is an illegitimate child. “Jokowi, Antara Hantu Komunisme dan Vonis si ‘Nemo’ Ahok,” *CNN Indonesia* 10 May 2017

<http://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20170430150901-20-211255/jokowi-antara-hantu-komunisme-dan-vonis-si-nemo-ahok/> (accessed 27 June 2017).

²⁰ Max Lane, “50 Years since 30 September, 1965: The Gradual Erosion of a Political Taboo,” *ISEAS Perspective* no. 66, 26 November 2015.

²¹ As Vedi Hadiz said, “It is instructive, first of all, that when New Order elites were faced with their most serious crisis ever, they partly staved-off society-based demands for wide-ranging political reforms by utilising an Islamic bulwark.” (in “Indonesian Political Islam: Capitalist Development and the Legacies of the Cold War”, *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 30 (2011), 32). That, along with the reheating of the “latent danger of communism” bogeyman and the need for “constant vigilance” against foreign infiltration and ideologies are well-used tricks, codified even in military training materials (see Honna 2013). Pancasila has also been used as a “Pancasila Front” and the notorious “Pemuda Pancasila” paramilitary of the New Order (see Ryter 1998). More recently, Pancasila was used as a rallying call, e.g. the symposium organised by a group of high-ranking generals and the FPI to counter the 1965-66 symposium by the government using the title “Defending Pancasila from the threats of Communist revival and other ideologies”. In other words, it can be put against “other ideologies” that attempt to bring any critical voices. This malleability is also a reason why we need to watch the recent reinforcement, including the establishment of the presidential working unit, for the implementation of Pancasila as the state ideology. See “Jokowi inaugurates chief, advisors of Pancasila working unit,” *The Jakarta Post* 7 June 2017 <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/06/07/jokowi-inaugurates-chief-advisors-of-pancasila-working-unit.html> (accessed 27 June 2017).

²² “Dewan Pers Terapkan Barcode untuk Media Terverifikasi,” *CNN Indonesia* 9 January 2017

<http://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20170109084724-20-184890/dewan-pers-terapkan-barcode-untuk-media-terverifikasi/> (accessed 5 June 2017); “Perlawanan “Netizen” Lahirkan Masyarakat Anti-“hoax”” *Kompas.com* 8 January 2017;

<http://tekno.kompas.com/read/2017/01/08/10495047/perlawanan.netizen.lahirkan.masyarakat.anti-hoax> (accessed 5 June 2017); “Digital media literacy important to counter fake news: Researcher,” *Antara News*, 3 May 2017

<http://www.antaraneews.com/en/news/110744/digital-media-literacy-important-to-counter-fake-news-researcher> (accessed 5 June 2017).

without strong institutional rails or an established tradition of fact-checking.²³ Indonesia also has a dizzyingly diverse population with hundreds of languages and ethnic groups, which inhabits thousands of islands. While hosting one of the world's largest numbers of Facebook and Twitter users,²⁴ Indonesia still has very uneven internet coverage, with only 20-30% internet penetration. Among those with access to broadband, 3G or higher connections can get as high as 30-100 Mbps, while there are millions whose Internet is limited to 2G technology and Facebook (and increasingly, WhatsApp).²⁵ Within such a landscape, effective fact-checking can be very difficult and costly.

Forcing “anti-hoax” and fact-checking strategies without addressing foregoing issues risks silencing critics and entrenching an established media²⁶ that are already dominated by a few wealthy, powerful moguls related to political figures or parties.²⁷ These strategies might also cause further polarisation: non-believers of “hoaxes” or “experts” blame “stupid”, “backward” others for not understanding what “real” news is. Believers meanwhile would likely ignore and distrust the label, feeling further marginalised and thus more justified in their rage.

Education failures and the depoliticised “floating mass”

Below the media landscape, the roots of rising polarisation run deep. There is a complex interplay between class and socio-cultural identity politics, and it is important to unpack the concept of class and socio-economic divides beyond ethnic and/or religious stereotypes. For a long time, stereotypes about “rich Chinese” vs “poor Islam pribumi” served as a convenient basis for faction fights, despite the divergence of allegiances within different ethnic groups and classes.²⁸ Yet, the *persekusi* cases also demonstrate that both hijab-

²³ Southeast Asian countries rank uniformly low, with Indonesia at the highest place at 124th out of 180 countries, in “2017 World Press Freedom Index,” *Reporters without Borders* <https://rsf.org/en/ranking> (accessed 27 June 2017).

²⁴ The ranking was published by Semiocast in 2012, but soon spread to other mainstream media such as Forbes and CNN. Other than Jakarta, Bandung was the only Indonesian city included in the list. Singapore ranked 11th.

http://semiocast.com/en/publications/2012_07_30_Twitter_reaches_half_a_billion_accounts_140_m_in_the_US (accessed 27 June 2017).

²⁵ The “average” Internet speed in Indonesia is 6.7 Mbps, but coverage is very uneven. Broadband subscriptions are expensive, and up to 95% users access the Internet only through mobile phones, with only 13% using personal computers. The national average of Internet penetration rate is only around 22%. Some reports mentioned 30%, because almost 8%—literally millions—of Indonesians when surveyed said that they did not use the Internet, but stated that they are on Facebook.

²⁶ “LBH Pers: Barcode Media Tak Efektif Tangkal Hoax,” *CNN Indonesia* 9 February 2017 <http://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20170209163332-20-192399/lbh-pers-barcode-media-tak-efektif-tangkal-hoax/> (accessed 5 June 2017).

²⁷ Ross Tapsell, “The Political Economy of Digital Media,” *Digital Indonesia: Connectivity and Divergence*. Singapore: ISEAS, 2017. See also Tapsell, Ross, “Indonesia’s Media Oligarchy and the “Jokowi Phenomenon””, *Indonesia*, 99 (2015), 29–50.

²⁸ Hew Wai Weng, “Diversity not Uniformity: Chinese Muslim Preachers and Politicians in Indonesia,” *ISEAS Perspective* no. 45, 30 June 2017. See also Greg Fealy, “Bigger than Ahok: explaining the 2 December mass rally,” *Indonesia at Melbourne* 7 December 2017

wearing Muslim physicians and ethnic Chinese boys are equally vulnerable to these attacks, signifying that they are not necessarily driven by sectarian or religious conservatism, but point more to old tricks of intimidation and protection rackets to deter critical voices.

Here I raise one area where class and identity politics may overlap which is worthy of further research: the rapid expansion of formal education *in quantity, but not in quality*.²⁹ Due to widespread corruption and teacher absenteeism, alongside poor performance in reading comprehension, math, and science, Indonesia's education system has been frequently lambasted. Equally serious, however, is the country's refusal to soberly address its depoliticised "floating mass".³⁰ The number of schools and colleges has grown drastically with various options catering to specific classes or ethnic/religious groups, particularly with the presence of many private organisations running the vast majority of higher education institutions boasting promises of international standards and good career prospects. Often integrated with the rapid development of gated estates or satellite cities complete with apartments, shopping malls, private security and transportation, these institutions also perpetuate segregation by spatially separating and reducing meaningful interactions among different socio-economic groups. Nevertheless, both private and public education curricula continue to skirt away from teaching the nation's history and political ideologies. These expanding educational institutions also bring no proof of better career options, with un(der)employment numbers highest among those with higher education, leading to a constant expansion of the country's expendable surplus population.³¹

How does this un(der)employment, along with the expansion of a young, educated population in Indonesia, contribute to creating a disenfranchised, factionalised mass vulnerable to the spread of fake news and sectarian sentiment? There are growing signs that the networked media industry's unprecedented expansion has created new image-branding professions that are particularly attractive to youth, and have become regarded as key elements in business marketing and political campaigning, e.g. "cyber armies" and social media "buzzers".³² This is an area worth further study, especially since information and

<http://indonesiaatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au/bigger-than-ahok-explaining-jakartas-2-december-mass-rally/> (accessed 27 June 2017)

²⁹ *Education in Indonesia*, ed. by Daniel Suryadarma and Gavin W. Jones (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013).

³⁰ The "floating mass" policy was an unofficial manifesto created during the New Order to "protect" Indonesians from learning "foreign ideologies", participating in practical politics and joining political parties. The policy was designed by Ali Moertopo, a key figure in masterminding networks of *preman* as quasi-official, expendable enforcers. See *Indonesian Politics and Society: A Reader*, ed. David Bourchier and Vedi R. Hadiz (London & New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 45–48.

³¹ Indonesia has one of the largest gaps in youth unemployment and inactivity in the Asia Pacific at around 20–22%, compared to the overall unemployment at around 5–6%. See Michele Ford, "Youth Unemployment Haunts Indonesia," *China Daily*, October 31, 2014; Truman G. Packard and Trang Van Nguyen, *East Asia Pacific at Work: Employment, Enterprise, and Well-Being* (Washington: The World Bank, 2014).

³² See for example, "In Indonesia, buzzers are not heard, but tweet for money," *Reuters* 22 August 2013 <http://www.reuters.com/article/net-us-indonesia-twitter-idUSBRE97L14T20130822> (accessed 27 June 2017). The MUI even released a fatwa banning the use of buzzers for economic and non-economic gains as *haram*. "MUI Terbitkan Fatwa Pemakaian Media Sosial, Ada 5 Hal

communication technology (ICT) has actually been removed as a compulsory school subject in 2013. Efforts to improve digital skills and information literacy in a country that boastfully aims to be the largest digital economy in Southeast Asia by 2020 are dependent upon scattered initiatives driven by disparate departments, private companies, media, and various non-governmental organisations.³³

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Fake news and issues of persecution have existed for a long time. But today's networked media landscape, with its dependence on viewers' clicks, has created a hotbed for the rapid spread of "post-truth" sensational headlines and sectarian racketeering. Indonesia is not unique in this case, nor are its various (state and non-state) scrambled attempts to halt the rapid dissemination of (mis)information online by restricting access or persecuting users.

The Ministry of Communication and Information has recently blocked a popular encrypted messaging app, Telegram, on the grounds that it poses a threat to Indonesian national security. The Ministry also stated that in anticipation of the surge of fake news ahead of and during the 2019 presidential election, a special team will be formed in collaboration with Facebook to block 'negative content' such as hoaxes and pornography.³⁴ However, neither of these short-term solutions nor calls for "tougher" measures—like re-instilling Pancasila or clamping down on intolerance, already prone to be manipulated by various camps—will work without addressing the historical build-up sketched above. The lack of any significant legal and security reforms has facilitated the unabated growth of *preman* groups, with a significant ability to mobilise a militant mass. The lack of legal and security reforms has also allowed these groups to gain more bargaining power with political elites and generate intimidating protection rackets through violence and coercion under sectarian banners.

Additionally, a highly manipulable media landscape alongside poorly-reformed education systems have structurally deprived Indonesians of the basic equipment required to deal with the historical and technological complexities that shape contemporary life, both offline and online.

yang Diharamkan," *Kompas*, 5 June 2017

<http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2017/06/05/20001581/mui.terbitkan.fatwa.pemakaian.media.sosial.ada.5.hal.yang.diharamkan> (accessed 27 June 2017).

³³ Ross Tapsell & Edwin Jurriens (eds.), *Digital Indonesia: Connectivity and Divergence*. Singapore: ISEAS, 2017.

³⁴ Telegram is said to be the most popular messaging application among jihadists, since it had from its very beginning implemented end-to-end encryption, although other messaging apps like WhatsApp have also adopted it. The app has been unblocked after Telegram agreed to open a special communication line for the Indonesian government. "Indonesia ready to unblock Telegram," *The Jakarta Post* 1 August 2017

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/08/01/indonesia-ready-to-unblock-telegram.html>;

"Facebook forms team to tackle hoaxes in Indonesia," *The Jakarta Post* 2 August 2017

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/08/02/facebook-forms-team-to-tackle-hoaxes-in-indonesia.html> (accessed 2 August 2017).

Efforts to minimize hoaxes and *persekusi* will not succeed without understanding the history and policies that moulded contemporary mindsets.

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