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A Research Report by CSIS Indonesia

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Addressing Disinformation in the Papuan Conflict: Intersectional Actors, Strategies, Motivations, and Funding Sources

Vidhyandika D. Perkasa¹, Wida A. Puspitosari²

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The first casualty when war comes is 'truth' (Knightley, 2004)

Background

Social media platforms dominate almost every aspect of human interaction, from interpersonal relations to the global economy (Bradshaw, 2020). Undoubtedly, nowadays, the internet and social media have a multilevel impact on the everyday life of mankind. It proved an essential tool for elites, political actors, state and non-state actors, and social movement activists to spread their ideas, gain followers, and go into action, showing the world testimonies, pictures, and videos in real time (La Rosa, 2014).

Despite its relevance and function, social media is an open platform. People use it for right and wrong purposes (Bute, 2014). People use social media to ignite and organize rioters, protests, and other social movement activities. Over the past two decades, state and non-state actors have also increasingly used the internet and social media to pursue political and military agendas by combining traditional military operations with cyber-attacks and online propaganda campaigns (North Atlantic Treaty Organization cited in Bradshaw, 2020).

As such, we can see that social media platforms are not neutral platforms. The platforms' design and governance also impact their democratic functions, including how disinformation and propaganda are spread. This is a major concern as part of the socio-political implications of technology and social media usage. Disinformation is fake or inaccurate information intentionally spreading to mislead and/or deceive. In general terms, there are certain purposes why people distribute disinformation. First, to persuade people to support individuals, groups, ideas, or future actions. Second, to persuade people to oppose individuals, groups, ideas, or future actions. Third, produce emotional reactions (fear, anger, and joy) toward some individual, group, idea, or future action to promote support or opposition. Fourth, prevent an embarrassing or criminal act from being believed. Fifth, exaggerate the seriousness of something said or done, and sixth, create confusion over past incidents and activities (Shu, Wang, Lee, and Liu, 2020).

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In this report, we want to contextualize social media with disinformation and conflict. In the literature discourse, one aspect of social media disinformation is often overlooked: its effect on conflict. Disinformation or fake news is used as a weapon of political warfare in conflict situations. Social media has become a platform used by both state and non-state actors to spread disinformation with objectives to bolster tension and conflict. In conflict settings, actors use fake news as a political weapon to manipulate the audience into believing something they would not normally believe. In addition, actors on all sides may manipulate information to garner support for their cause, pitting opposing players in the conflict against each other by framing the other side incorrectly (Cherry, 2019). Numerous research have shown that through the ages, war and conflict have always been marked by the use of lies, propaganda, and disinformation (Crilley and Chatterje-Doody, 2021).

We have chosen Papua, located in the most eastern part of Indonesia, as the location of this study. Papua has experienced prolonged conflict implicating separatist groups known by various names, such as the OPM (Organisasi Papua Merdeka or Papua Independence Movement), the TPNPB (Tentara Pembebasan Nasional Papua or West Papua National Liberation Army) and the KKB (Kelompok Kriminal Bersenjata or the Armed Criminal Group), with the Indonesian security apparatus (military/TNI and police), which tends to escalate. The Indonesian security apparatus has always been in the spotlight due to numerous human rights violations. There are also horizontal conflict incidences involving indigenous Papuans (OAP) in tribal conflict or between the OAP and migrant communities. Migrant communities tend to be the target of atrocities. However, in the age of hybrid warfare and conflict, civilians in Papua are increasingly both the objects and subjects of disinformation, which is imperilling their safety and well-being (Katz, 2020).

From our observation, the internet has become more relevant and significant to fuel conflict in Papua. Despite efforts to develop Papua, there is no sign that the conflict will subside. Another reason for choosing Papua is the data released by The Monitoring Board of Election (Bawaslu) on the 2024 Election Vulnerability Index. Papua ranks number one in the index. Based on such indicators, approaching the upcoming election, the Papua conflict could escalate, fuelled by hoax and disinformation. In the upcoming 2024 election, there will be 4.356.653 eligible voters from the six provinces in Papua, with 1.306.414 voters originating from Papua Mountain Province.

In such a case, we cannot underestimate the role and impact of social media and disinformation in the Papua conflict. It is undoubtedly understood that disinformation in Papua does not spread in a vacuum. Its ability to penetrate public debates, confuse, and undermine trust in institutions or authority is often based on existing socio-cultural divisions. Normally, disinformation targets pre-existing vulnerabilities and groups of people supposedly inclined to trust such sources and narratives and who may willingly or unwillingly contribute to their dissemination (Colomina, 2022). Papua's vulnerability to disinformation in conflict settings could also be attributed to various factors.

Socioeconomic and cultural inequalities vis-à-vis the indigenous Papuans (OAP) complicate the above issue. The immigrants became settlers in the region and gradually took control of the local economy and bureaucratic positions. They experience better living than the OAP. Affirmative action to protect and empower the OAP has not yet been acquired, resulting in alienation and

marginalization towards the OAP in their homeland – generating paranoia, jealousy, and hatred across generations, especially towards the migrant communities.

In addition, Papua's rich natural resources have become the target of massive exploitation by predatory business actors relying on military protection and interests accompanied by intense land-grabbing owned by the indigenous people. A constant flow of bribes to the military/TNI and police ensured the inhumane treatment of Papuans and weakened local participation in development. This situation inevitably creates an undeniable record of human rights abuses. Sadly, there is the tendency that the violators (referring mainly to military and police apparatus) have never been brought to trial and have enjoyed high impunity.

Bad and weak governance is also a widespread phenomenon in Papua. It concerns cultural factors, lack of capacity and managerial skills, and weak law enforcement (Perkasa, 2011). The government has failed to manage development due to massive corruption, nepotism, and collusion. Furthermore, racism has become an alarming and unresolved problem, too. It has been structurally embedded in the daily lives of the Papuan population.

Cultural issues also prevent native Papuans from advancing economically and sustaining their vulnerability. The high social spirit of the OAP coupled with very expensive cultural rituals such as customary fines (*bayar kepala*) that must be fulfilled, make it difficult to save or develop their economic activities. The influx of Special Autonomy funds is also considered to have damaged the work mentality of native Papuans. They became lazy, spoiled, and highly dependent on aid. Many have turned to alcohol and are addicted to inhaling glue (carbon), especially among young children and youth. When people are hungry, they can be easily incentivized to engage in conflicts. From the explanation above, conflict and vulnerability in Papua are triggered by ideological, political, economic, and socio-cultural issues. Disinformation is like new ammunition that deepens the conflict and societal vulnerability.

This study examines the complex disinformation landscape surrounding the Papua conflict in Indonesia. After its independence, Papua has endured a long history of discord rooted in its contested integration into Indonesia. As mentioned, the region witnessed various phases characterized by distinct political, economic, and social dynamics. Crafting a backdrop and clarification on the social intricacies that define Papua as a conflict zone, this context unveils a stark contrast between the portrayal of the conflict in national news and the grassroots reality. In recent years, as mentioned above, the rapid spread of disinformation on social media has added layers of complexity to the conflict. Fabricated narratives and misleading content about issues in Papua proliferate across platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and TikTok. This enables the weaponization of disinformation to manipulate public sentiment.

In a concerted effort to comprehend the dynamics of disinformation, researchers ventured beyond the confines of the digital landscape, immersing themselves in on-the-ground investigations. Jayawijaya Regency, located in the Papua Mountain Province, with its capital in Wamena, became the focus due to its recurrent reports on riots and conflict. It offers a nuanced perspective and is well-known as Papua's number one hot spot. While, Jayapura in the Papua Province and Yogyakarta in Central Java were strategically chosen to glean insights into overarching views on conflict and disinformation in Papua, with a special focus on understanding

the Papuan youth perspectives as progressive users and beneficiaries of internet and technology.⁴ The research also analyzed how intersectional state and non-state entities leverage disinformation tactics to shape opinions, conceal inconvenient truths, and discredit opposition. It also examined case studies of specific incidents involving rumors, conspiracy theories, and doctored content.

In more detail, the literature defined state and non-state entities as bad actors, a generic term for those who intentionally create and propagate disinformation. This category of actors encompasses states, corporations, local elites, social movements, rebel groups, security apparatus, and individuals. We want to understand their strategies and motivations, which span a spectrum of political, economic, ideological, and financial interests. We would investigate online disinformation through the component of intersectional of bad actors or the ones that create and push online disinformation, the platforms that facilitate targeted and low-cost distribution, and the audiences or the ones that respond to cognitive and emotional triggers (Culloty and Suiter, 2021).

We can observe intersectional bad actors through digital traces they leave behind in public fora; that is, through their patterns of online behavior and the types of content they create. The selection rationale is underpinned by the recognized duality in disseminating disinformation in Papua. The first avenue involves its propagation which we will focus only on national mass media, local news outlets, and social media channels to capture the most relevant data and insights that influence perceptions of the Papua conflict. The second, equally significant, entails the circulation of localized narratives across various platforms and chain messages within WhatsApp groups within the communities. As mentioned earlier, against this backdrop, the study aimed to unravel the actors, motivations, and funding sources behind disinformation campaigns focused on Papua. It compiled prevalent hoaxes propagated online and via messaging apps. In-depth interviews provided insights into common false narratives among local communities.

Methodology

We compiled a list of the most prevalent and impactful disinformation related to Papua issues. This included topics such as development, inequality, the Free West Papua campaign, racism, mass riots, rebellion, human rights abuses, assassinations, violence, and militaristic activities. The following is a detailed explanation we employed for this research.

⁴ We acknowledged the significant contribution of our two local research assistants in Wamena Papua, Margaretha Sibarani and Madeline Ramandey who have assist us in this study. We also would like to thank Verlin Waruwu, Delia Zonggonau and Adriana Yogi in Yogyakarta and Roberthus Yewen in Jayapura would have helped us in connecting to our respondents.

Literature Review

In the initial phase of our research, we conducted a thorough literature review to explore existing scholarly works, reports, and articles related to disinformation in Papua. This comprehensive examination allowed us to identify recurrent themes and prevalent disinformation discussed in academic circles. By synthesizing information from various sources, we established a foundational understanding of the disinformation landscape in the region.

Digital Landscape Analysis

Simultaneously, we meticulously analyzed the digital landscape, focusing on major social media platforms like X, Facebook, and TikTok. We monitored discussions, trends, and the virality of different claims through this digital scrutiny. This approach enabled us to pinpoint disinformation that gained prominence in the online space.

Creating a Database

We established a database that tracked claims, sources, and findings to manage the gathered information. This database included columns for the claim itself, the source of the claim, our assessment (e.g., debunked or unverified), and any pertinent notes.

Media Content Analysis

To understand the impact of disinformation through mainstream channels, we scrutinized national and local news outlets. This involved a detailed examination of narratives presented by these outlets, helping us discern prevalent disinformation that has permeated mainstream media. This step was essential in identifying the claims that have gained traction through traditional news sources.

In-depth Interviews

Recognizing the importance of capturing local perspectives, we conducted interviews with various stakeholders, including community and religious leaders, academician, business actors, security apparatus, human rights activists, journalists, and government officials in Wamena, Jayawijaya Regency, Jayapura, and the Papuan students in Yogyakarta. This qualitative approach offered on-the-ground and first-hand insights into commonly believed disinformation to enrich our understanding of the prevailing narratives at the grassroots level.

Digital Analytics Tools

Employing digital analytics tools like CrowdTangle and NodXL, we quantitatively assessed the reach, sentiment, engagement, and virality of different disinformation on social media platforms. This data-driven approach allowed us to identify the most impactful claims in the digital sphere, offering a quantitative perspective on the prevalence and influence of specific disinformation topics.

Consultation with Experts

Collaborating with experts in Papua, including academics, researchers, and individuals with local expertise, played a pivotal role in our research. Their insights and knowledge provided a deeper

understanding of the nuanced dynamics of disinformation in the region, helping us validate and contextualize the prevalence of certain disinformation.

Cross-Verification of Sources

To ensure the reliability and accuracy of our findings, we adopted a cross-verification approach. Information from various sources, including online platforms, traditional media, and local community feedback in the research locations, was systematically compared and validated. This process allowed us to triangulate data, offering a more robust and comprehensive view of the prevalent disinformation in the disinformation landscape of Papua.

Reflexivity and Reporting

Throughout the research process, we maintained awareness of our biases and potential influences on the research. We documented our reflections on how our presence impacted the community under study. In the final stage, we compiled our findings into a coherent analysis and presented our insights in a manner that is accessible and engaging for our intended audience.

Ethics

In adherence to ethical principles and ensuring the safety and security of our informants, we have chosen to anonymize the identity of the informants in our investigation.

Observation from the Online Sites

Media Landscape and Sentiment Analysis

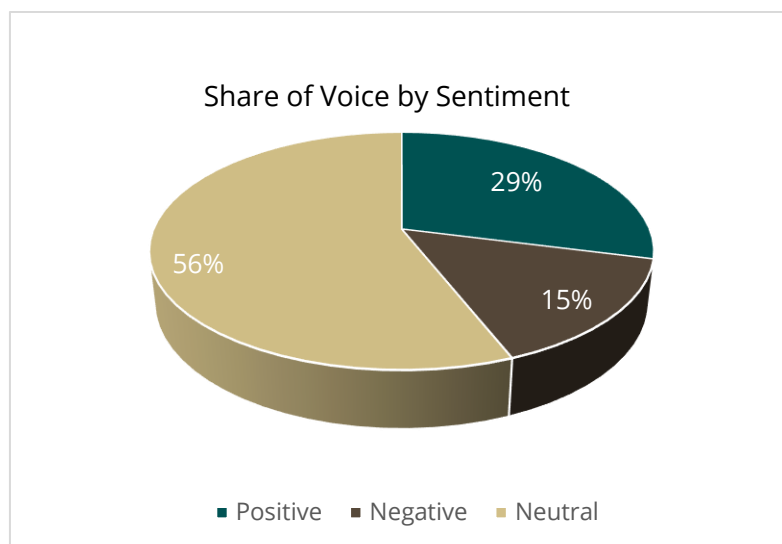
Our comprehensive analysis of Papua's media landscape gathered intriguing insights into the region's news coverage, employing tools like CrowdTangle and NodXL. The information gathered during our observation period, from January 2022 to December 2023, revealed a substantial volume of 360,345 articles across diverse online media platforms. These articles provided broad insights into the region's news coverage. The extensive coverage generated a notable buzz, with a remarkable 807,483 mentions across various platforms. X emerged as a significant player in shaping the discourse, garnering a staggering 3,177,980 mentions. At the same time, Facebook discussions also played a substantial role, contributing an additional 434,333 mentions to the overarching conversation.

The prevalence of neutrality in Papua's news coverage during the observed period signifies a balanced and objective reporting style. This neutrality, which constituted a substantial 56% of the reports, indicates that many media outlets strove to provide a factual and impartial account of events and issues related to Papua. One noteworthy aspect of this neutrality was its persistence, even when Papua Governor Lukas Enembe, was in the spotlight due to corruption allegations. A set of predefined criteria was established to ensure consistency in categorization, considering factors such as neutral language, avoidance of subjective framing, and absence of overt opinion. The assessment involved reviewing a representative sample of news articles to ensure inter-rater reliability. It is essential to note that the determination of 'neutral' status is inherently subjective

to some extent, and variations in interpretation may occur. However, by adhering to predefined criteria and employing multiple evaluators, we aimed to enhance the reliability of the categorization process. While 56% was identified as the percentage of reports meeting these neutrality criteria, we recognize that this figure is subject to differing perspectives on what constitutes balanced reporting standards.

Conversely, negative sentiment loomed large in reports concerning TPNPB or KKB (Kelompok Kriminal Bersenjata - Armed Criminal Groups) attacks, riots in Papua, and the tragic loss of lives involving both civilians and security forces targeted by TPNPB attacks. These somber narratives constituted a significant portion, encompassing 15% of the news. KKB activities have emerged as a prominent concern that captured the attention of netizens and online media platforms alike. This topic consistently ranked among the top issues discussed on both social media and online news outlets. This aspect of negative sentiment underscores the grave security challenges that have persisted in the region. CNNIndonesia is notably the most active media outlet in framing its reports about Papua in a negative context.

In Graphic 1, the prevalence of positive reporting, accounting for 29% of the news coverage, sheds light on commendable efforts undertaken by the government and TNI-Polri/security forces in Papua. This positive sentiment signifies a conscious shift towards adopting a more humanistic approach in their interactions with the region. By emphasizing the humanistic approach, the government and TNI-Polri aim to address the multifaceted needs of the local population. This approach encompasses policies and actions that prioritize security and consider the social, economic, and cultural aspects of the communities in Papua. Conversely, the media network antarnews.com, which includes papua.antarnews.com and papuabarat.antarnews.com, tends to predominantly present positive framings in its coverage of Papua.



Graphic 1. Share of Voice by Sentiment

While positive reporting on the Government and TNI-Polri efforts in Papua can offer a glimmer of hope, it's essential to acknowledge potential challenges and skepticism in the context of region's complex issues. In such a way, communities have concerns about selective reporting, where positive aspects of the Government and TNI-Polri's actions are highlighted while negative incidents are downplayed. Skeptics argue that without full transparency and comprehensive reporting, assessing the true extent of progress or challenges in Papua is challenging. On the other hand, Papua is a region with diverse perspectives and interests, and not all communities may share the same positive view of the government and security forces. Critics argue that positive reporting did not adequately represent the voices and concerns of all Papua's communities, particularly those who have grievances or have experienced negative interactions with authorities. Lastly, skeptics also point out the complexity of conflict resolution in Papua. While a humanistic approach is commendable, the root causes of the conflict are deeply entrenched and multifaceted.

National Media Dominance

National media outlets dominated the narrative around Papua, aligning seamlessly with the frequent quotations of national figures by online media sources. The influence of national media outlets in shaping the narrative around Papua extends beyond just reporting; it encompasses a multifaceted impact on both the region and the broader national context. National media outlets, often located in major urban centers, have the resources and infrastructure to disseminate information on a massive scale. This widespread reach means their portrayal of Papua can profoundly affect how the issue is understood and discussed across the public in Indonesia and internationally. When they highlight specific incidents, they can amplify certain narratives and potentially overshadow others. This power to influence public opinion and government policies is a double-edged sword, as it is responsible for providing balanced information and the potential for biases.

The alignment of national media with frequent quotations of national figures signifies a symbiotic relationship between the media and the government. It suggests that these outlets often act as conduits for official statements and government viewpoints, which can heavily shape the discourse surrounding Papua. While this alignment can enhance the visibility of government efforts and policies, it raises concerns about impartiality and independence in journalism. Critics argue that such alignment can lead to a lack of critical scrutiny, potentially allowing government actions in Papua to go unquestioned.

One of the most significant challenges of national media dominance is the potential marginalization of local voices and perspectives within Papua. Indigenous communities, local activists, and grassroots movements find it difficult to have their concerns and experiences adequately represented in the national narrative. This gap in representation can further exacerbate feelings of marginalization and disempowerment among Papuan communities, hindering efforts to address local grievances and conflicts. Furthermore, the media's alignment with national figures can impact policy and decision-making processes. The framing of issues by dominant media outlets can influence how policymakers perceive the situation in Papua and the urgency of addressing specific challenges. This, in turn, can directly impact the formulation of government policies in the region.

Towards the end of the observation period, we witnessed a noticeable shift in media attention towards the rescue mission for Susi Air pilots with several significant implications. This diversion of focus moved the spotlight away from broader Papuan social issues, including development, health, and food security. This shift highlights the media's inclination to prioritize human-interest stories that evoke emotional responses and capture the public's imagination. Dramatic events, such as a rescue operation, tend to resonate more with audiences, making them a focal point for reporting. However, this emphasis on immediate, compelling narratives can sometimes detract from the persistent, systemic issues that communities in Papua face, including development challenges, healthcare disparities, and food security concerns. Moreover, the change in media focus can potentially influence public perception significantly. When the spotlight shifts to a specific event, it potentially leads to a temporary surge of interest and sympathy. Still, it can also eclipse the broader, ongoing problems faced by Papuan communities daily. These long-standing issues, which require sustained attention and efforts, remain in the shadows as media coverage temporarily shifts gears.

Platforms and Channels: Disseminating Manipulative information

During the observation period, a concerning trend emerged in the form of hoax issues that proliferated on social media platforms, particularly X and TikTok, further complicating the discourse on Papua.

X⁵

During this period on X, several hoax issues emerged, including allegations of child kidnapping in Wamena, claims of TNI involvement in the mutilation of Tarina Murib, false assertions of FPI supporting the formation of an Islamic state in Papua, and unfounded reports of Lieutenant Colonel Deddy Corbuzier leading the Banser and Densus 88 in an operation to counter the KKB, with additional claims of Banser's readiness for deployment to confront the KKB. These particular hoaxes issue garnered significant engagement, sparking fear and outrage among the online community. The dissemination of such false information not only sows panic but also diverts attention from real issues that deserve genuine concern.

Another disturbing hoax on X involved a graphic and distressing claim of TNI (Indonesian National Armed Forces) officers mutilating a woman named Tarina Murib. This hoax not only shocked and angered social media users but also had the potential to damage the reputation of the TNI. However, the Cenderawasih Regional Military Command later clarified that there was no such incident, highlighting the dangerous consequences of spreading false information.

⁵ See also an article by Dave Mcrae, Maria del Mar Quiroga, Daniel Russo-Batterham and Kim Doyle. 2022. A Pro-government disinformation campaign on Indonesian Papua. This research identifies an Indonesian language Twitter (X) disinformation campaign posting pro-government materials on Indonesian governance in Papua, site of a protracted ethno-nationalist, pro-independence insurgency.

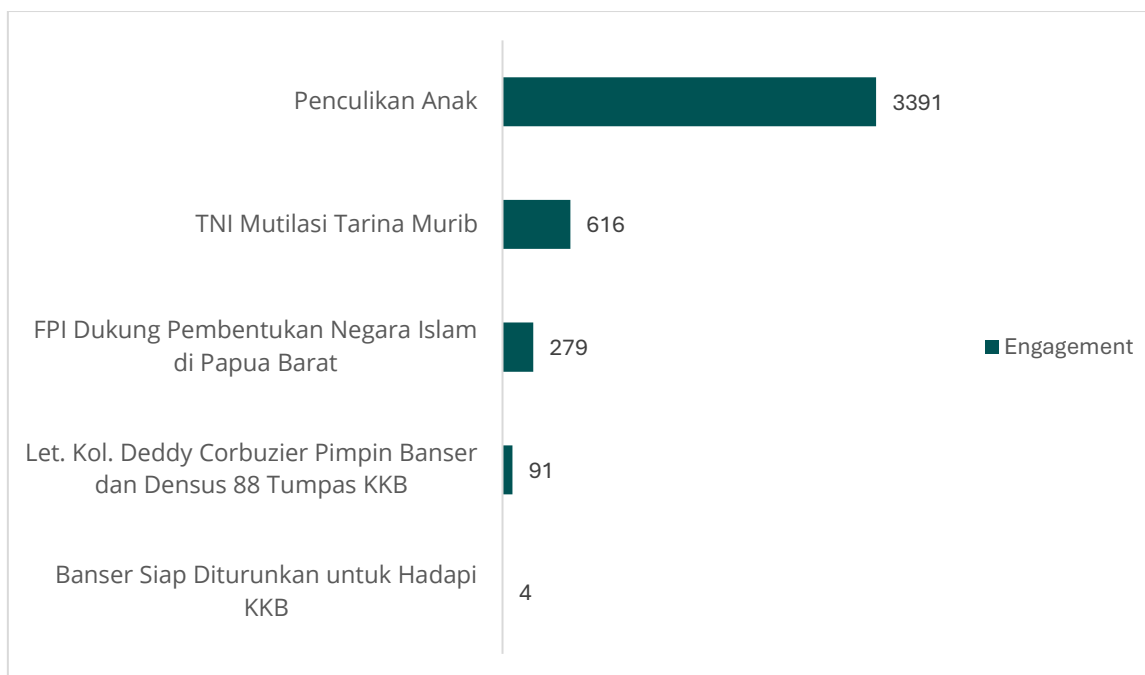


Figure 1. Number of exposure

Based on Figure 1 provided above, the number of appearances of an exposure indicates its overall engagement. Users have removed several posts; consequently, the uploads detected through monitoring mostly consist of clarifications regarding various hoax issues circulating on X's social media platform. The hoax issue concerning child kidnapping has garnered the highest number of engagements. This issue pertains to an alleged attempt to kidnap children in the Keerom district near Jayapura in the Papua Province. However, it has been publicly clarified that the claims regarding child kidnapping in Papua are unfounded. The circulating photo is also of a traffic accident victim who fell from the vehicle in which they were traveling. In line with our findings, shown in Table 1, here are the top accounts of alleged X hoax spreaders about Papua:

Table 1. Top Accounts of Alleged Hoax Spreaders about Papua

No	Account Name	Affiliation	Issus raised
1	@jayapuranesia	Papuan information account	The alleged attempt to kidnap a child took place on Thursday, February 16, 2023, in Keerom Regency.
2	@K_keroman	Pro free West Papua account	Tarina Murib, a civilian mutilation victim, was discovered deceased, her

			body decapitated, in Sinak, West Papua, on March 3, 2023.
3	@EkaSilawati2	Pros of the Government / Cons of Anies Baswedan	Alert!! FPI ⁶ Supports Anies Baswedan in Establishing an Islamic State in West Papua
4	@farimanwhk	Pros of Ganjar Pranowo account	Lieutenant Colonel Deddy Corbuzier promptly mobilized BanSer and Densus88 ⁷ forces to Papua to counter Papuan KKB terrorists.
5	@AjiSukarno88	Public	Banser ⁸ is eager to be deployed to Papua to combat the KKB.

TikTok

TikTok became a platform where different hoax issues related to Papua circulated. These included false claims about OPM/KKB (separatist groups) surrendering, fake videos depicting a Papua earthquake, misleading information about the number of TNI victims in OPM shootings, unfounded rumors about the arrest of prominent figures like Governor Lukas Enembe and TPNPB/OPM leader, Egianus Kogoya, and even romanticized portrayals of TNI soldiers' actions against OPM. What is particularly concerning about these TikTok hoax issues is that they are often disseminated by anonymous accounts, which makes it difficult to hold individuals accountable for spreading false information. These accounts predominantly belong to pro-NKRI (Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia) groups, reflecting a broader agenda of advancing Indonesia's position

⁶ The Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), or "Front Pembela Islam" in Indonesian, is an Islamist organization based in Indonesia. It was founded in the late 1990s and is known for its conservative and often hardline interpretation of Islam. The FPI has been involved in various activities, including protests, rallies, and moral policing, with the aim of promoting and enforcing what it sees as Islamic values in Indonesian society. However, the group has also faced legal issues and government crackdowns due to its confrontational and sometimes controversial actions.

⁷ Densus 88, short for Detasemen Khusus 88, is an elite counter-terrorism unit in Indonesia. It is known for its role in combating and responding to terrorism-related activities and threats in the country. Densus 88 is under the authority of the Indonesian National Police and has been involved in various operations to combat extremist groups and maintain national security.

⁸ Banser, officially known as "Barisan Ansor Serba Guna Nahdlatul Ulama," is the paramilitary youth wing of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which is Indonesia's largest Muslim organization. Banser NU plays various roles, including community security, disaster relief, and social activities. The organization is based on the principles of NU, which is a moderate and inclusive form of Islam that promotes religious tolerance and social welfare.

and interests. This aligns with the broader narrative of some individuals or groups who seek to manipulate public perception and exploit social media to promote their own viewpoints, regardless of the accuracy of the information they share.

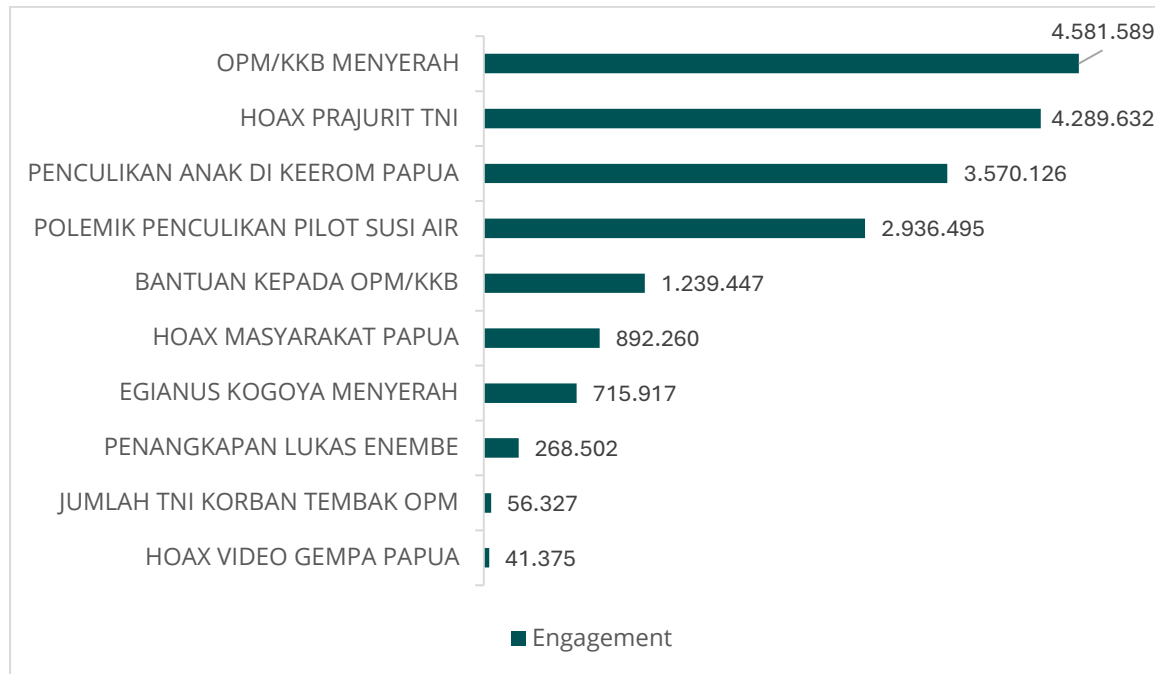


Figure 2. Numbers of fabricated videos

As shown in Figure 2 above, numerous fabricated videos have surfaced from the aforementioned graph, showcasing the OPM/KKB group allegedly surrendering during President Jokowi's tenure. These videos are designed to shape a particular narrative and manipulate public perception. Alongside these, additional videos portraying the KKB group surrendering in encounters with the TNI are often disseminated to glorify the military's efforts in maintaining security in Papua. The spread of disinformation related to TNI soldiers encompasses various aspects. First, some reports highlight specific soldiers' alleged misconduct and unethical behavior, which can significantly damage the armed forces' reputation. False information romanticizing the TNI's role in Papua's conflict is also concerning. These narratives often aim to create a heroic image of the TNI.

For instance, one hoax involves videos depicting TNI soldiers purportedly being attacked by crocodiles while in pursuit of the KKB. This is intended to exaggerate the challenges and dangers faced by the military, possibly garnering public sympathy. Second, another prominent claim revolves around soldiers utilizing a church as a military headquarters. These images and allegations are potentially intended to stir controversy and shape public sentiment regarding the military's presence in the region. For the Papuan, which is predominantly Christian, churches are holy buildings that must be sterilized from any military intervention. Such a picture is an insult to the Christian congregation, especially if it involves a pose of pointing a rifle at the church signboard. The proliferation of such disinformation raises serious concerns, as it can distort

public understanding of complex issues and fuel tensions in Papua, which has long been affected by various social and political challenges. In Figure 3, here are some prominent influencers known for spreading disinformation on TikTok:

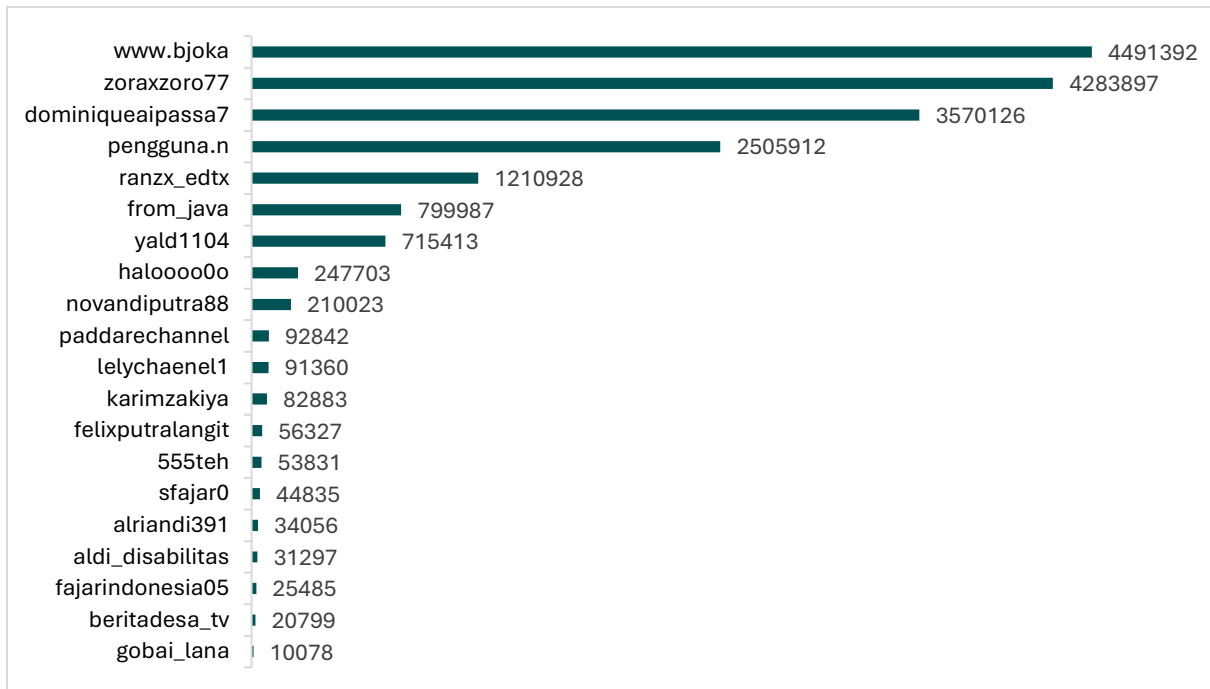


Figure 3. Influencers spreading disinformation in Tik-Tok

The data reflects the engagement each account's uploads have garnered, providing insights into their online impact. The @www.bjoka account is notable for its involvement in spreading disinformation and is aligned with support for the Republic of Indonesia. The content shared through this account includes claims that OPM has chosen to align with Indonesia under the leadership of President Joko Widodo (Jokowi). This narrative may lack a factual basis and promote a certain agenda.

Hoax spreaders primarily associated with anonymous accounts, adding complexity to the online landscape. These accounts often share videos containing news emphasizing Indonesia's perspective and priorities. Furthermore, these accounts tend to have affiliations with pro-NKRI (Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia) groups, which support the Indonesian state's unity and integrity. The prevalence of such accounts, particularly those promoting disinformation, can have significant implications for public perception, understanding, and social and political discourse.

Furthermore, the investigation provides detailed metrics showing high engagement on videos spreading alleged disinformation on TikTok before being taken down. Accounts with more followers tended to see greater traction. For example, @aldi_disabilitas had 196.3K followers, and their hoax video got 3,100 views. Meanwhile, @zoraxzoro77 had 56.7K followers, and their hoax clip earned over 4 million views. Another account, @www.bjoka, with 50.6K followers, also

exceeded 4 million views on their debunked video. Accounts with fewer followers saw lower but substantial engagement, like @firmanwandana382 with 2268 followers garnering 5836 views. In total, 41 videos are related to disinformation. The combined view count for all the videos is over 27 million. The total number of likes for the hoax videos over 59,000 times. To break it down, the average views per video was over 651,000. The average likes per video were around 45,000. Each video received over 8,000 comments on average, and the average share count was 1,439 per video. The most popular hoax video from @zoraxzoro77 earned over 4.2 million views. The video from @www.bjoka exceeded 4.4 million views, and @aldi_disabilitas received over 3 million views on their fake earthquake video.

Cross-Platform Disinformation: The Rapid Dissemination of Disinformation in the Papua Discourses

Cross-platform disinformation is a concerning trend in the digital age, where false information originating on one social media platform spreads like wildfire to others, often with new narratives. During the observed period, several such disinformation emerged, showcasing the complexities of disinformation dissemination. One example of cross-platform disinformation involved photos shared on WhatsApp with false information claiming that several churches in the Nduga region were being used as Indonesian military posts. This disinformation was not confined to a single platform but swiftly replicated on TikTok videos with a soldier pointing a rifle at the church signboard mentioned above, amplifying its reach and impact. Former Komnas HAM (National Commission on Human Rights) member Natalius Pigai also contributed to the spread of this disinformation by sharing it on his personal X account (@nataliuspigai2) on 4 June 2023, albeit with a different narrative, framing it as a case of religious harassment. This illustrates how disinformation can quickly traverse multiple platforms, evolving with varying narratives along the way.

Facebook

On Facebook, another instance of cross-platform disinformation involved a video upload claiming that Papua Governor Lukas Enembe had passed away. The post accompanied the narrative "innalillahi wainnailaihi rojiun⁹, Lukas Enembe can't be helped ~ viral news." While the video upload was eventually taken down, the damage had been done, as many netizens reported it on other media portals with various allegations. WhatsApp also played a role in the dissemination of this hoax, with the emergence of a murder theory surrounding Lukas Enembe's alleged demise. The shared photo with the caption "Lukas E died" closely resembled the video clip that had circulated on Facebook. The implications of cross-platform disinformation are far-reaching. They highlight how disinformation can swiftly traverse various social media platforms, making it challenging to contain its spread or correct false narratives once they take hold. Moreover, these disinformation have real-world consequences in Papua, potentially causing panic, tensions, and the erosion of trust in reliable sources of information.

⁹ "Innalillahi wainnailaihi rojiun" is an Arabic phrase that is often used in the context of Indonesian people to express condolences and sympathy upon hearing about someone's death. This phrase is used to convey the belief that life and death are in the hands of God.

Community WhatsApp Group

Cross-platform propagation allows disinformation to spread swiftly from one arena to another, penetrating diverse segments of society. Fabricated narratives about Papua emerging on TikTok can catch fire among youth. Viral videos full of hoaxes then get shared on Facebook and WhatsApp groups, making the jump from entertainment social media to personal networks. Mainstream and partisan news outlets pick up the popular conspiracies circulating online, amplifying them on their sites and TV channels, conferring legitimacy. Community groups on WhatsApp and Facebook transmit and discuss the sensationalized stories, which then get passed along by word of mouth. The repetitive exposure across video sites, social networks, media outlets and peer groups reinforces the false messages. Critical context gets lost as the salacious details jump platforms. Soon the distorted narratives penetrate public consciousness, shaping perspectives on sensitive issues in Papua. This potential trajectory illustrates the complex interplay between different elements of the information ecosystem that allows disinformation to proliferate rapidly. TikTok trends do not stay siloed - they often migrate to other social platforms and eventually into mainstream discourse, mutating along the way. Understanding these cross-platform dynamics is key to mitigating the spread of harmful propaganda and for enforcing platform accountability.

Looking beyond the viral spread of manipulated content online, it is critical to peel back the layers of the key players involved in propagating disinformation about Papua issues. While digital platforms and social dynamics enable the swift proliferation of propaganda, these efforts do not materialize out of thin air. Complex motives and agendas are in play among an array of state and non-state actors producing and deploying weaponized narratives aimed at shaping perspectives. As hoaxes fan out across the internet, the opaque origins of fabricated storylines obscures who stands to gain from sowing confusion around Papua. Drilling down on the key players manufacturing and weaponizing disinformation reveals the competing agendas and political fault lines exacerbating tensions. Understanding the dynamics between state and non-state actors in propagating false narratives can unlock the roots of polarized perspectives that allow propaganda to thrive across platforms.

The Axes Between State and Non-State Actors: Who Is Behind Disinformation in Papua and What Are the motives?

The information presented here is a compilation derived from various sources, including works of literature and insights from trusted informants such as influencers, journalists, Papuan students, local communities, and a content creator who have provided valuable perspectives on the complex landscape of disinformation in Papua. This narrative spans the period from June to October 2023, shedding light on the region's intricate web of social, political, and media dynamics. These accounts have been collated to offer a comprehensive understanding of the challenges surrounding the spread of disinformation, the suppression of credible sources, and the manipulation of narratives in Papua during this specific timeframe. The aim is to provide a nuanced portrayal of the multifaceted issues at play, emphasizing the complexities that arise from conflicting narratives, accusations, and the impact on public perception within the Papua region.

The spread of disinformation has found fertile ground in Papua that is grappling with complex social and political dynamics. Common tactics employed to propagate disinformation about Papua

have varied over time and are complicated. In this sense, the Indonesian government has been accused of blocking credible sources of information about the situation in Papua, while allowing false information to spread. In August 2019, the government shut down the internet connection in Papua provinces due to several mass riots in the region. Some experts said that suppressing information in times of conflict can be detrimental and potentially jeopardize its credibility. While the purpose is to prevent the spread of fake news, it has made the flow of information, and thus verification of claims and counterclaims, more difficult. Truth became one of the first casualties¹⁰. Our student informants mentioned, those who report on the situation in Papua and provide facts that contradict the official narrative have also been accused of spreading disinformation, complicating the distinction between truth and disinformation. When individuals or organizations challenge the official narrative, they are accused of having ulterior motives and biases. Accusations of being sympathetic to separatist movements' foreign interests are used to discredit their reporting, even if their information is grounded in evidence.

Some local authorities in Papua also deny reports of violence and human rights abuses, labelling them as disinformation. This approach serves as a means to downplay the severity of the situation by employing media outlets, and it often involves a range of strategies aimed at manipulating public perception and diverting attention from critical issues¹¹. They attempted to discredit the source of the reports by questioning the credibility of the presented information, making it easier for the authorities to dismiss the reports as disinformation. By demanding irrefutable evidence and dismissing anything short of incontrovertible proof, local authorities created an unrealistic burden of proof for those reporting on human rights abuses in Papua. This tactic led to public skepticism and effectively shielded the authorities from accountability. Sometimes, they promised investigations into reported incidents while deliberately delaying the process. This tactic created a perception of action being taken while giving time for attention to wane and public outrage to subside, as well as to shift public focus away from the core issue.

A worse scenario is that, through manipulating public sentiment and nationalistic fervor, the government framed allegations to tarnish the nation's reputation and undermine stability over foreign interference, fostering a united front against perceived threats. By identifying external entities as the source of allegations, the government constructs external scapegoats and deflects responsibilities from themselves. This narrative portrays the government as a victim of malicious external actors, further strengthening the government's position in the eyes of the public. These actions are executed by intensifying positive sentiments through social media and media outlets.

Furthermore, a significant pattern of disinformation spread in Papua has constantly been revolving around political narratives, human rights issues, development and infrastructure, ethnic and religious tensions, security concerns, and international perspectives. Pro-independence activists, government supporters, and other stakeholders have also exploited digital platforms such as WhatsApp, X, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Tik Tok to shape public opinion in their favour, amplifying their messages while discrediting their opponents. The social media has also

¹⁰ <https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/a-pro-government-disinformation-campaign-on-indonesian-papua/>

¹¹ <https://lens.monash.edu/@politics-society/2023/09/06/1386111/disinformation-in-the-city-the-challenges-facing-australian-and-indonesian-local-governments>

created “digital village” of Free West Papua activists. According to the investigation, social media has helped to transform the Free West Papua Campaign from a social networking movement to an activism movement on human rights abuses and political situation.

Other than that, it is important to note that disinformation about Papua issues are not limited to one side of the conflict. Both pro-government and other interested actors have been involved in spreading false information to further their respective agendas. Additionally, these disinformation are carefully crafted through a deliberate process to distort the view of the situation in Papua and influence policy decisions. For example, a well-funded X campaign has been using bots/automated accounts to promote a pro-government agenda about Papua to skew international views of Papua. The use of bots helps to propagate fake news and inflate their apparent popularity on X, to allow the simultaneous sharing of the same content, creating the illusion of widespread support. On the other hand, Papua’s struggle for self-determination has garnered attention from the international community. Disinformation have also been used to portray international involvement as malicious interference against national sovereignty¹².

Such narratives often aim to divert attention from the genuine grievances of Papuans and undermine international support for their causes. This narrative amplification involves the role of Papua neighbourhood countries’ activists such as Tonga, Vanuatu, Fiji, and New Guinea¹³. In this sense, the vested interest groups take advantage of the fact that the average social media users tend to believe what they share with others without questioning the source information. As a result, bots can broadcast high volumes of fake news, make it look credible, quickly go viral, and reach a large audience when they tap into existing biases and emotions. To make the disinformation legitimate, stolen profile photos are often used for the account involved in spreading the false information. These profile photos include images of celebrities, random people, and stock photos. Anonymous or even pseudonymous accounts on social media have mostly been involved in disseminating disinformation, even as instigators. The lack of accountability allows perpetrators to evade consequences and perpetuate their actions without facing repercussions.

On the other hand, most Papuans believe that the government and military forces are intricately linked in the propagation of disinformation, especially since strong financial resources and advanced infrastructure back them. Two researchers, Benjamin Strick and Elise Thomas, from the Bellingcat Investigation Report, argued that the Indonesian government has taken significant steps to control the information that reaches the international community about what is happening in West Papua. This has included intermittently cutting the internet in the region and preventing foreign journalists, NGOs, UN officials, and humanitarian staff from entering Papua. Spreading disinformation influences the international community’s political perceptions, favoring the Indonesian government’s action in Papua. This includes involving a Jakarta-based communications and social media consultancy, InsightID, which was one source of this information campaign. InsightID recruited many short-term interns as content writers for this Papua project.

¹² <https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/a-pro-government-disinformation-campaign-on-indonesian-papua/>

¹³ <https://theconversation.com/how-the-world-failed-west-papua-in-its-campaign-for-independence-129623>

This perception reflects a deep-seated distrust in official sources of information and has significant implications for regional dynamics. This sentiment is rooted in historical and contemporary factors. Past instances of government disinformation and human rights abuses, coupled with ongoing political tensions, have fostered a climate of suspicion. Many Papuans perceive the government and military/police as influential in shaping the narrative surrounding regional issues. This belief includes the notion that disinformation is employed to manipulate public opinion and uphold a specific status quo. The absence of transparency and accountability in disseminating information only deepens these suspicions. The consequences of such widespread skepticism are profound. They contribute to social divisions and hinder efforts to build trust between the government, military/police, and the local Papuan population.

Misused Funding Fuels Deceptive Campaigns in Papua

Between September and October 2023, our trusted informants, including well-known influencers, journalists, a contractor, and a content creator, report that the actors involved in financing the dissemination of disinformation about Papua are primarily linked to the national government in collaboration with security forces who often hire media consultants. These consultants are reportedly involved in crafting and spreading disinformation campaigns. This relationship between the national government and the consultants engaging in such activities is a concern. They positively aim to vilify the TPNPB/OPM. By spreading disinformation about their malicious activities, they seek to portray the TPNPB/OPM as a threat to national security and stability. This portrayal serves to justify government actions and operations in Papua.

Another objective of the disinformation campaign is to divert attention from suspicions of corruption at the local government level which is a crucial aspect of the complex dynamics in Papua. The campaign achieves this by intensively promoting a narrative of successful development in Papua. However, the stark reality on the ground often contradicts these claims. Many local residents have openly expressed that they have yet to witness significant positive changes in their living conditions despite the extensive promotion of development successes. Moreover, these residents have provided clear and compelling accounts and illustrate that the promised improvements have not materialized as expected. They describe a situation where a significant amount of allocated funds for development projects remains obstructed and raises questions about the transparent use of public resources.

The disinformation campaign actively portrays an alternate reality where remarkable progress has been made, thereby diverting public attention from the pressing issue of suspected corruption within the regional government. This disinformation maintains the status quo and perpetuates the belief in local government efforts and effectiveness in the development of Papua. What makes this situation even more perplexing is that from our informants' statement, the funding for these hoax-spreading efforts often originates from the corrupted Special Autonomy fund, which is intended to improve the welfare and well-being of the Papuan people.

On the other hand, the financing for disinformation campaigns also indirectly stems from officials, including former or acting political elites and local officials who have played a role in shaping the prevailing and engineered conditions. According to one informant, these funds are partly sourced from the revenue-sharing arrangements associated with regional infrastructure project tenders,

wherein 10% of the total contract amount agreed upon by the officials and contractors is collected. The individuals leverage these funds to orchestrate circumstances by propagating disinformation, often to conceal corruption outcomes or undermine political opponents. Further details and specific case examples will be elaborated in the subsequent discussion.

On-The-Ground Realities: Key Insights from Field Research

The results of our observations of disinformation through online platforms, despite their complexity, only provide a partial picture of what is happening in Papua in the context of propaganda and fake news. The results of our field research observations, specifically in Wamena, Jayawijaya Regency, Papua Mountain Province, have provided deeper and more complex nuances related to disinformation patterns, intersectional actors, motivations, strategies, and funding. The goal was to engage directly with local communities to reveal nuanced realities about the Papua conflict.

This field investigation, where we talked to various sources in Yogyakarta, Jayapura, and Wamena, has opened our minds as researchers to the truth of information and events or information that has been continuously tried to be 'buried' through disinformation propaganda through social media. One thing that stands out from the findings of this field is how a single conflict event can be superimposed by various actors for various interests and motivations. Disinformation has played a significant role in fuelling this conflict. Options for finding truthful information for Papuans are very limited due to constraints on digital literacy and infrastructure. The dualities between disinformation propagated online through various platforms, and the empirical impacts on the ground are often not linear, although they are interrelated. Online disinformation and its impact or what is happening on the ground have their own complexities.

Case Study 1: Racial Tensions, Civil Unrest, and Alleged Disinformation

From the perspective of the Indonesian government, several disinformation have spread about the Papua conflict, such as disinformation related to riots that are common in the region. False information about riots frequently creates panic and fear among the public. Between August and September 2019, according to security forces, Indonesia blamed disinformation for unrest in Papua that killed 19 civilians and a soldier¹⁴. In the same case, another news broadcast that a day of violence in Papua saw at least 27 dead in the cities of Jayapura and Wamena. The day of violence came after a period of relatively calm in the area, which was shaken by large-scale protests a month later in both regions in response to accusations of racism. A student mob is said to have attacked a soldier and police officers in Jayapura with machetes and rocks. The unrest erupted after a group of Papuan students in Surabaya were taunted. Nationalist organizations charged Papuan university students in Surabaya with destroying an Indonesian flag during the Independence Day celebration, which sparked the prior demonstrations. The gangs had provoked

¹⁴ <https://www.9news.com.au/world/unrest-in-papua-kills-19-civilians/18bd3ef1-deb1-456e-b85f-3bc35f886cbf>

the pupils by referring to them as "dogs," "pigs," and "monkeys."¹⁵ Papua police later denied that the violence was related to racism, calling it a 'hoax.'

However, an interesting and highly significant point to delve into is the 23 September 2019 racism incident in Wamena, which occurred just two months after a similar incident in Surabaya. This event marked a troubling pattern of racial tensions and discrimination that had been festering for years. In Wamena, the situation escalated when allegations emerged that a Batak¹⁶ teacher, in a position of authority, had resorted to offensive language by referring to her Papuan students as "monkeys" (*keras*). She is considered a new teacher in the area and does not understand the sensitivity of such derogative words. The student subsequently reported it to another friend and their parents; not long after, social media coverage and chain messages on WhatsApp regarding this news rapidly disseminated and exacerbated the masses' emotions. In response, the local government and security forces covertly suspended the internet network, although they later attributed the outage to the damage to the internet optical cable. According to an informant, it has become a pattern that the internet service is intentionally disrupted during moments of tension. As a result, information about the Batak teacher's actions spread even more extensively through word of mouth. We posit that the tight-knit kinship system and high level of trust among Papuans contributed to the widespread circulation of this news, often without the need for verification.

The incident sent shockwaves through the local community and ignited a furious response. It symbolized the larger issues of inequality and racial bias that Papuans had endured for generations. In the aftermath of this incident, a huge number of students took to the streets and demanded an end to racial discrimination. Interestingly, not all of the participants in the demonstration were genuine students. An informant revealed that in the days leading up to the protest, there was a surge in sales at school uniform shops, and many individuals, including illegal riders, were observed wearing these uniforms to masquerade as students. This raised suspicions as it was evident that a group of individuals with mature faces and beards couldn't genuinely represent students. The informant believed these impersonators were associated with a pro-independence group that had infiltrated the protest.

However, according to our other trusted and influential informant, the situation was seemingly orchestrated with a dual purpose. This event occurred against the backdrop of longstanding racial tensions in the region, especially those related to social and economic jealousy between OAP and the migrant population. Shops and houses owned by the migrant population had been targeted, burned, and destroyed. It also catalyzed significant mass mobilization and civil unrest in the town, which shows the OAP's resentment towards the migrant population. Most of the victims are from the migrant population.

¹⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-49806182>

¹⁶ The Batak people who migrate to Wamena are typically part of the Batak ethnic group from North Sumatra, Indonesia. They have moved to Wamena, for various reasons, including economic opportunities and other personal motivations.

Rumors circulating at the time hinted at a disturbing motivation behind the incident. Our informants stated that it was suggested that certain elements within the former regent of Jayawijaya, John Wempy Wetipo's administration, have engineered this situation to divert attention from ongoing corruption investigations and to eliminate potentially incriminating paperwork and evidence. As the masses fervently assembled in front of the government office, their anger and frustration were palpable. What sets this event apart is that, contrary to the initial perception that the protesters aimed to burn down the front entrance, their actual objective was to gain access to the rear building.

This was where key documents and evidence relating to corruption allegations of former regent were believed to be stored. Upon gaining entry to the back building, chaos erupted, and a blaze was ignited. This building became known as the financial department, marking a pivotal moment in the Wamena community's quest for accountability. Subsequently, there was also a presumption that the fire symbolized Wetipo's displeasure with the present administration of John Richard Banua (JRB), who was at that time the Deputy Regent during Wetipo's administration. Banua had previously endorsed the former governor of Papua, Lukas Enembe, during his gubernatorial candidacy rather than supporting Wetipo's campaign for governor. The Wamena racism incident, which turned out into riots, also aimed to discredit Banua's leadership.

Recently, the local government made an official announcement, stating that the Batak teacher's assertion about the word "monkey" was a deliberate deception. The situation was initially met with skepticism by the public alike. As events unfolded and based on our investigation, more information came to light, revealing that the teacher's claim was, in fact, an accurate representation of a genuine occurrence. The word "monkey" referred to a code word used in a community dispute and its significance had been altered by the local government from "kera (monkey)" to "keras (aloud)" to spread disinformation. It then led to the initial dismissal of the teacher's statement as a hoax, but subsequent investigations confirmed its authenticity. In such incidents, migrant communities and the general OAP communities are vulnerable to local political fabrication, which results in massive property destruction and unrest.

The racism case in Wamena on 23 September 2019 has proven how many actors capitalize on an incident of racism for various motives. The events of 23 September 2019 can be categorized as engineered conditions (*cipta kondisi*) and not purely the result of racism. The racism case is a strategy to trigger this conflict. There are at least four motives behind this racism incident. The first motive is an attempt to expel or show hatred towards migrants who are considered to have deprived native Papuans of economic and political opportunities. This conflict was quickly ignited because the perpetrator of racism was a Batak teacher who was part of the migrant. Secondly, as mentioned above, this incident was used by local political elites to eliminate evidence of corruption and rivalry to demonize the image of political opponents. Third, conflicts always generate large operating funds for the security forces. Fourth, in conflict situations, the OPM/KKB can take this opportunity to fight the security forces. Each actor can work alone or collaborate, involving intersectional actors in creating this conflict.

This incident can be very destructive, resulting in deep trauma for the people of Wamena. There was an exodus of migrants out of Wamena because their lives were threatened. This incident quickly escalated the conflict not only because of the four motives above but also because of the influence of disinformation. It is difficult to control what narratives developed apart from a Batak teacher's ape (kera) statement to an OAP student. OAP hatred of migrants allows other hate narratives to be created that trigger conflict escalation, even though the truth of these narratives is doubtful. In addition, the government has exacerbated the situation by suggesting that the ape phrase is a hoax. This deepens native people's distrust of the government. By spreading disinformation related to racism, it has actually fostered hatred between native Papuans and migrants.

Case Study 2: The murder of Michelle Kurisi

On 28 August 2023, Michelle Kurisi, a female activist, was shot dead in Kimbim Jayawijaya. Before the incident, a viral video circulated on social media where Kurisi was interrogated by several 'actors' regarding her presence at the scene. Not long after, photos of Kurisi lying dead after being shot circulated

A war of information emerged after Kurisi's death. On WhatsApp, a news story with the following narrative appeared (in its original text):

'TPNPB News. Arsip. Pasukan TPNPB Batalyon Egisu Kodap III Ndugama Telah Berhasil Bunuh Intel Indonesia Atas Nama Ibu Michelle Kurisi Ndogo Wamena Papu pada tanggal 28 Agustus 2023.

Siaran Pers Manajemen Markas Pusat Komnas TPNPB per 28 Agustus 2023

Manajemen Markas Pusat Komnas TPNPB telah Terima laporan resmi dari Pimpinan TPNPB Kodap III Ndugama Derakma bahwa Pasukan TPNPB dari Batalyon Egisu Kodap III Nudgama Derakma telah berhasil tembak mati Ibu Michelle Kurisi Ndogo di Kimbim, Kabupaten Jayawijaya Papua.

Pembunuhan ini telah dilakukan pada hari Selasa tanggal 28 Agustus 2023, dan ini merupakan peringatan keras kepada orang asli Papua yang lain yang menjadi agen TNI polri di Papua, ingat TPNPB akan ikuti setiap langkah bagi orang asli Papua yang menjadi Spionase TNI polri.

The TPNPBNews:

Tentara Pembebasan Nasional Papua Barat, Organisasi Papua Merdeka (TPNPB-OPM)

Kodap III Ndugama-Derakma

Pada tanggal, 29 Agustus 2023

Laporan resmi dari TPNPB batalion Egisu Kodap III Ndugama-Derakma. Melaporkan bahwa pada tanggal, 28 Agustus 2023, telah menembak salah satu intelejen negara indonesia.

Pasukan kodap III Ndugama Darakma batalyon egisu telah ketemu seorang ibu bernama "Micella Kurisi Doga di kimbim jalan baru, dan telah berhasil bunuh dia.

Dan POLISI sudah AMBIL MAYAT DI TKP.

Pembunuhan ini telah dilakukan Setelah diinterogasi tujuannya dalam perjalanan menuju ke Kwijawagi mau ambil data pengungsi perang masyarakat nduga.

Negara gunakan ibu Micella Kurisi mengambil data dan lakukan pemetaan di basis TPNPB di seluruh Papua. Namun intelijen TPNPB mempunyai data dan mengikuti perjalanan ibu Mecella, dia setelah ambil data di Keneyam kab. Nduga, setelah itu dia mau masuk, namun pasukan TPNPB telah berhasil bunuh.

Data yang dimiliki dia salah satunya INTELIJEN NEGARA INDONESIA, Data lain yang dimiliki TPNPB seorang ibu Micella dan beberapa pimpinan papua merdeka juga di incar oleh ibu tersebut. Kamu orang papua yang jadi mata-mata itu kami akan bersihkan, kami tidak akan pila-pilakon laki-laki kah perempuan kah siapapun yang sudah ada nama-nama ini akan kami bunuh.

Demikian Laporan resmi kami. Ndugama, 29, Agustus 2023.

Penanggung jawab Tentara pertahanan Daerah Kodap 3 ndugama-derakma. Brigjend. Egianus Kogeya. Panglima Kodap III Ndugama-Derakma dan Mayor Pemne Kogeya. Komdan operasi kodap 3 ndugama-derakma.

The: awak media Tpnpb/opm kodap III Ndugama-Derakma.

Diteruskan kepada semua pihak oleh Jubir Komnas TPNPB Sebby Sambom, dan Terima kasih atas kerja sama yang baik.

The viral chat circulating in WhatsApp groups after Kurisi was shot dead, described above, essentially explained why TPNPB (Tentara Pembebasan Nasional Papua Barat or the West Papua National Liberation Army) killed her. Kurisi was considered TNI/Polri intelligence and was assigned to map the TPNPB base. There is also a tone of threat to kill any indigenous Papuan who spies for the TNI/Polri. When examined more carefully or when doing forensic information from the chat

above, it seems that there are several people involved in writing the text. Several words are not written consistently in spelling, for example, 'batalyon', which is also written with 'batalion' and Derakma with Darakma. There is also no consistency in the use of capital letters. The language style is also far from correct Indonesian grammar. Whoever wrote this chat wanted to give the impression that the native Papuan did it. Not all OAPs can write and speak Indonesian well. Kurisi's name is written in three versions: Michelle, Mecella, and Micella.

After the news about the murder went viral, photos of Michelle Kurisi next to BIN and Polri officials began to appear. Facebook was one of the sources that published photos of Kurisi's closeness with TNI/Polri officials. The question is, if Kurisi is considered mapping the whereabouts of TPNPB bases, and if it is true that she is TNI/Polri intelligence, why is there no escort process? The TNI/Polri should understand the danger of letting Kurisi wander alone in the jungle filled with TPNPB members. In such a case, the general public wants to know who sent or ordered Kurisi to do the mapping. News also emerged that Kurisi's presence in the area was also on a mission to locate the kidnap Susi Air pilot Philips Merthen by the TPNPB that occurred in February 2023.

The government, represented by military and police officials, finally denied the allegation that Kurisi was a BIN agent or state intel. According to Kapendam XVII / Cendrawasih, Lieutenant Colonel Inf Johanis Parinussa, Kurisi is a civilian helping refugees in Nduga. This statement is debatable. Although Kurisi are not officially recruited as TNI/Polri intel, she has been provided with many facilities by both institutions. This of course, will bring a feeling of debt so that inevitably Kurisi will help the interests of the TNI/Polri.

On 5 October 2023, Michella Kurisi's case grew. The police claimed to have arrested three KNPB (Komite Nasional Papua Barat or National Committee for West Papua) militants accused of murdering Michele Kurisi. Four are still at large. KNPB is also known and accused by the police of spreading harmful propaganda about Papua through social media.¹⁷ The KNPB denied the accusation. The KNPB fights peacefully in the city. The task of the militants is to secure KNPB activities in the city and not to kill people. KNPB has an organizational platform and has rules and operational standards for the tasked as community security and peaceful struggle activists. KNPB strives to uphold democratic values, human rights values, and tolerance and prioritizes a dialogical approach. KNPB feels that the TNI/Polri always uses them as a scapegoat.¹⁸

The case became even more interesting after TPNPB leader Egianus Kogoya vehemently denied that his group had killed Kurisi. Kogoya never issued an order to kill Kurisi.¹⁹ A few days later Komnas HAM Papua received a complaint from Kurisi's parents who said that there were TNI

¹⁷ Tiga pembunuh aktivis Michelle Kurisi ditangkap, Pelaku ternyata anggota KNPB, Detik Sulsel, 9 Oktober 2023

¹⁸ KNPB Bantah Tudingan Aparat Tentang Keterlibatan Pembunuhan Michele Kurisi, Suara Papua, 9 October 2023

¹⁹ Egianus Kogoya klaim bukan pembunuh Michelle Kurisi, Komnas HAM Papua bereaksi, Tribun Papua, 20 October 2023

personnel involved in the murder of the humanitarian activist. Komnas HAM Papua is currently seeking clarification from Pangdam XVII Cendrawasih.²⁰

From the results of our field studies, some young Papuans fighting for independence also argue that Kurisi's killer is not TPNPB but the security forces. Kurisi was considered intel from the security forces on a specific mission. Since her mission 'failed', it was better to kill her so that Kurisi would not leak the secret of her connection with the security forces. Until the real killer of Kurisi is known, all the news that develops can be considered as disinformation or a systematic and structured effort to spread untrue news. The motive is clearly to demonize or defame the parties involved, both TPNPB and TNI/Polri. The news or information that cornered TPNPB as the killer of Kurisi clearly has a motive to strengthen the public's bad image of TPNPB atrocities. Moreover, TNI/Polri have denied that Kurisi was their intel. A universal philosophy holds that killing civilians is an unforgivable crime. Meanwhile, if TNI/Polri are the killers, it will perpetuate their bad image as perpetrators of violence and human rights violators, especially involving civilians as victims.

From the perspective of disinformation, if TNI/Polri is proven as the killer of Kurisi, the public will get new knowledge that in every incident, the actor is the security apparatus by spreading slander or untrue news to bring down the image of the opposition in this case TPNPB. The community's reasoning bias will strengthen or their rationality will be compromised because they will solidly believe that the perpetrators of violence and crime are the security forces, even though it is not all true. The Kurisi's killings definitely impacted on the society: creating fear, anger, distrust, and other mentality breakdowns.

Case Study 3: The Child Abduction

In addition to cases of disinformation laden with political interests, another incident illustrates the destructive aspects of information that resulted in riots, destruction of buildings, and casualties. The incident occurred on 23 February 2023 in a part of the city in Wamena called Sinakma. There is information related to indications that lead to child abduction. Interestingly, there are many versions of this incident. These versions can be read in several online media or by our conversation with several informants in Wamena.

The first version is that on that day, a car carrying goods suddenly stopped because the cover of the boxes came off. The car stopped, and the two passengers (the driver and the maid), who were ethnic migrants, tried to fix it. At the same time, a six-year-old indigenous Papuan child was standing near the car. One of the passengers greeted the child. The child then ran into the house and manipulated words to his family that she was going to be kidnapped. Soon, the family and the crowd began to arrive. The family interrogated the two men about their motive for kidnapping the child. Shortly afterward, the situation escalated due to the provocation of some people. News of the child abduction quickly spread through WhatsApp media. Just like in cases of racism, when

²⁰ Komnas HAM Papua: Ada anggota TNI yang diduga terkait pembunuhan Michelle Kurisi, Jubi.id, 20 Oktober 2023

tensions begin to escalate in child kidnapping incidents, the internet is once again disabled, and the news is disseminated through word of mouth.

The second version is that the child was accidentally hit by the car. The driver asked about the child's condition and was accused by the people around him of wanting to kidnap the child. People began to arrive, including those who provoked them. The case eventually broke out into mass riots or unrest.

When we went to Wamena for a field study, it turned out that the incident differed from the information spread in the media. According to our trusted sources who observed the incident thoroughly, the car stopped in front of a shop owned by residents of Batak ethnicity. While unloading the boxes from the car, one of the boxes fell and hit a small child. The car driver approached the child to see if she was injured and held her shoulder. Some youths from the Nduga and Lani tribes asked the migrants if they planned to kidnap the child. The youth eventually called the child's parents. More people gathered and started beating the two migrants. The police arrived too late. The situation escalated after Dandim, or the head of the military office from OAP descent, tried to break it up. The arrival of the Dandim only made the situation hotter. People started throwing stones at the Dandim's car. Mass unrest finally broke out and killed ten people, including two from the Batak ethnicity who owned the shop above.

There were also widespread rumors circulating, pointing to the Nduga and Lani tribes, who reside in Sinakma and Wouma districts of Jayawijaya, as the source of the provocation. This provocation was believed to have deep-seated roots in the tribes' historical perspective towards immigrants. Over time, these tribes had developed a negative perception of immigrants to their region. One of the main reasons was the tribes' one-sided assumption that immigrants were primarily interested in land acquisition. They believed that these newcomers aimed to seize their ancestral lands and control the valuable resources found in their territories. This perception led to suspicions and tensions that had been simmering for generations.

The kidnapping case above needs to be examined carefully. People are easily provoked for several reasons. First, we heard similar news in Sorong City, where a mother from a migrant ethnic group was burned alive because she was accused of kidnapping a child. The video of the burning went viral. After investigation, the mother was mentally ill and had no intention of kidnapping a child. Secondly, the community was consumed by a video depicting the process of selling a kidnapped child's organs. The source of this video is in India, but people are not critical of the news source. Thirdly, in the eyes of native Papuans, migrants are an entity that is disliked because they are considered to be taking away the economic, cultural, and socio-political rights of native Papuans. This is exacerbated by an assumption that native people are undergoing a process of depopulation or extinction compared to ethnic migrants. Thus, the phenomenon of kidnapping children is seen as part of making native people extinct, especially when done by migrants.

Fourth, a myth has developed among native Papuans called 'potler' (cutting the neck), describing incidents where children are abducted. This myth is still much alive and believed by the local community. Fifth, the arrival of the Dandim, whose intention was to mediate and act as a hero, further worsened the condition because, in the eyes of native Papuans, there was a sense of dislike

when governed by a military officer from native Papuans. The native Papuans involved in the security forces were seen as spies and traitors. The community feels the Dandim have no right to come to their area and regulate the situation.

The child abduction case illustrates how information is dynamic. Initially, it can be categorized as misinformation because of the limited knowledge of the community to analyze an event. The misinformation in Sinakma was triggered by videos or information that was disinformation/hoax, like what happened in Sorong or India. The case in Sinakma eventually developed into disinformation because there was no effort to verify the actual events. The community finally relied on information considered 'valid', sourced from hoaxes in Sorong and India.

There is also a reasoning bias among the native Papuan community that reinforces the case of child abduction as real. The OAP wants to believe what they want to believe, even if it is far from the truth. Because of their hatred of migrants, native Papuans will easily believe that migrants have evil intentions with plans to kidnap the child. Native Papuans use the kidnapping case as ammunition to hate migrants further.

The theme of disinformation eventually developed not only towards the case of child abduction in Sinakma but also new disinformation emerged; for example, there was an effort to generalize an incident to be careful with people who would drop goods because they would kidnap children; migrants were seen as people looking for food but were eventually considered insolent because they kidnapped children and child abduction was used as a sacrifice for the construction of bridge projects. The implication is that the community will see infrastructure development as bringing child victims due to kidnapping.

There is also an analysis that the Sinakma incident was spontaneous, stemming from misinformation but finally politicized by disinformation that ultimately attacked migrants. There is a motive to make migrants afraid and finally leave Papua. The case also showcased the OAP's resentment towards military apparatus, especially from Papua descent. In closing, the circulation of various versions of the story of the child abduction case in Wamena shows a process of omission of information that can trigger prolonged conflict. This child abduction case can be used to create conditions or 'engineered conditions' (*cipta kondisi*) that certain parties utilize to achieve other interests in the future using this kind of case.

It is worth noting that cases of racism and child kidnapping serve as illustrations of how riots employ disinformation as a weapon. Ultimately, we observed that the various incidents in Wamena could serve as motives for retaliation by individuals or groups, even if they were not directly involved in the initial cases. This stems from pre-existing social resentment toward immigrants, security forces, and long-standing discrimination. Rational thinking can be compromised in the pursuit of emotional satisfaction. According to several informants, Papuans have a strong sense of vengeance, and grudges must be settled, even if it involves participating in riots. Consistent with this, the riots also allowed the TPNPB/OPM to participate and escalate the situation as a form of revenge against the security forces, with whom they have had a longstanding conflict. Thus, as mentioned earlier, it can be said that a single riot can be exploited to serve various conflicts of interest. Furthermore, informants also pointed out that the riots in Wamena

were partly a result of the lack of entertainment options for the people. Thus, in certain aspects, riots were seen as a form of entertainment that piqued people's curiosity, often fuelled by the spread of fake news propaganda.

As for the aforementioned cases, people tend to trust information from their peers, family, and acquaintances. In WhatsApp groups, participants consider fellow group members part of their social circle, making them believe and share information, even if it is false. Hoaxes in Papua often appeal to emotions, triggering strong reactions. In closed WhatsApp groups, where personal connections are strong, emotional responses can intensify, leading to more shares and greater visibility for hoaxes. This situation is generally performed by localized content in which individuals share a common geographical location or cultural background.

Hoaxes tailored to the local context, such as those related to Papua's political and social issues, can resonate strongly and be widely shared. The child abduction has witnessed the vulnerability of migrant communities, the child involved in the incident, and other victims of the unrest.

Concluding Note

This in-depth investigation into disinformation surrounding the Papua conflict unveils the complex dynamics at play. Multiple intersectional actors across state and non-state entities actively spread false narratives to manipulate public opinion and perceptions. Their motives include justifying military operations, concealing corruption, discrediting political opposition, and undermining Papuan independence movements. The research uncovered extensive evidence of disinformation traversing social media platforms like X, Facebook, and TikTok. Common themes include development successes, separatist surrenders, election results, racism incidents, and military victories against resistance groups. Local and national media outlets also frequently spread biased, incomplete, or misleading information aligned with official stances.

Behind the scenes are sophisticated, well-funded disinformation campaigns involving security forces contracting consultants to craft propaganda. Local elites and other intersectional actors also have a crucial role in this disinformation campaign for various motives. Funding streams hint at the misappropriation of Special Autonomy funds and infrastructure project kickbacks, indicating entrenched corruption. Case studies on racial unrest, an activist's murder, and child abduction showcase tactics to incite tensions, shift blame, and conceal the truth.

In more detail, from a micro context, the case of racism in Wamena in September 2019 proves how people in Indonesia have for so long been consumed by disinformation that tends to be 'state-constructed' and far from highlighting the truth of this incident. Interestingly, the racism situation was seemingly orchestrated with a dual purpose, which is very much politically motivated, involving intersectional actors with diverse agendas. This event occurred against the backdrop of longstanding racial tensions in the region. It also catalyzed significant mass mobilization and civil unrest in the town.

A specific example besides the racism incident is the child abduction case, which demonstrates how easily tensions can be incited using propaganda. A single event becomes engulfed in competing manipulated narratives and agendas. As mentioned, this research also uncovered funding links between Special Autonomy misappropriations and disinformation campaigns that pin to entrenched corruption incentives.

Ahead of the 2024 elections, the threat of disinformation also remains great, especially because of the 'skills' of the political elites, security apparatus and other actors in creating conditions (engineered condition or *cipta kondisi*) so that disinformation can develop quickly without being challenged. In the broader context, the increasing complexity of the problems in Papua is triggered by information that developed wildly in reporting the violence through social media, online media, or even word of mouth. The impact of the development of information without verification is the sharpening of societal polarization and the increasing potential for conflict and people's vulnerability.

The complicated situation in Papua regarding disinformation stems from people being left to interpret the acts of violence individually and collectively. This is because the warring parties tend not to verify the information circulating. In addition, these cases rarely receive adequate investigation, so they do not produce information that can educate the public.

This creates the impression that there is an 'information blackout' as part of the 'information war' (cyber-war) associated with the conflict between TPNPB and the security forces, as exemplified by the case of Michelle Kurisi's murder. In this context, information is used as both the 'weapon of the weak' and the 'weapon of the strong' in information warfare. The danger is the potential for disseminating inaccurate, unverified information that could deepen the conflict.

Verification of information is difficult in Papua due to restrictions on journalistic activities, technological and connectivity constraints, geographical isolation, the lack of community capacity to digest information, and deliberate efforts to manipulate information for the benefit of certain parties. Thus, there is a need for more in-depth research into information propaganda and disinformation, which includes analysing information content from the point of view of actors, motivations, strategies, and the impact of information dissemination on society in the context of information warfare (Perkasa, 2023).

As mentioned earlier, the actors involved are called 'bad actors' because they deliberately create and propagate manipulative information that confuses the public. 'Bad actors' can come from state entities, companies, social groups, individuals, or several actors simultaneously. Even if the information has substantial truth, it is considered manipulative if the motive is untrue. In vertical conflicts, the motive is to denigrate the parties involved, such as the TPNPB and security forces. Another motive is to seek collective support and justification for its actions, including to the international public. Meanwhile, the 'omission' of information, creation, and dissemination of fake accounts is a strategy aimed at individuals and online media that are perceived as opposition.

As a closing statement, Papua's isolations and constraints, such as literacy gaps and sub-par digital infrastructure, make addressing disinformation complex. Information propaganda and

disinformation must be dealt with more openly and transparently. The parties involved, both the authorities and separatist groups, must be more open in providing information that the authorities can verify. Verification of accurate information should be a priority, and reliable sources of information should be institutionalized. The involvement of civil society and other stakeholders in resolving the information war is crucial.

Encouraging press freedom and independent journalism in Papua will help address the pathologies of manipulative information and support fact-based information. In other words, tackling these complex challenges requires sustained collaborative action by the government, media, technology companies, and civil society groups. Initiatives promoting information integrity, critical digital literacy, and open dialogues across divisions can enhance social cohesion and lay the groundwork for lasting peace. No less important and what must be prioritized is to unravel and resolve the root causes of the very complex problems in Papua seriously.

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