

PRESS RELEASE

“Regional and Cross-Border Responses Towards Disinformation in Southeast Asia” 28 March 2024



From left to right: Mark Bryan Manantan (Director of Cybersecurity and Critical Technologies, Pacific Forum in Honolulu, Hawaii), Pieter Pandie (CSIS Indonesia), Beltsazar Krisetya (CSIS Indonesia), Damar Juniarto (Founder of PIKAT Demokrasi, and Advisor of Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network - SAFEnet), H.E. Yuyun Wahyuningrum (Representative of Indonesia to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), Fitriani (CSIS Indonesia), and Jonathan Tan Ghee Tiong (Assistant Director, Culture and Information Division, ASEAN).

Jakarta, 28 March 2024 - CSIS and Safer Internet Lab today launched a study report titled "Regional and Cross-Border Responses Towards Disinformation in Southeast Asia" at Hotel Ayana Midplaza, Jakarta. The Safer Internet Lab (SAIL) is a collaboration between the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) with Google Indonesia, focused on research and multi stakeholder engagement working to combat disinformation. This event serves as a platform for stakeholders to discuss the complex crisis of disinformation in Southeast Asia.

The study report launched not only to identify the challenges but also provides policy recommendations and strategies to strengthen regional early warning systems in combating coordinated disinformation campaigns. In addition, we planned this book launch as one of our events to commemorate **International Fact Checking Day** on April 2, 2024.

In his welcoming remarks, CSIS Executive Director Yose Rizal Damuri stated, "Coordinated computational propaganda, particularly evident during recent elections in various countries, has undermined the democratic process by influencing voter perceptions and decisions. Moreover, disinformation has fueled ethnic and religious tensions, contributing to conflicts and atrocities, as witnessed in Myanmar and elsewhere. To confront this crisis, CSIS, in collaboration with Google through the Safer Internet Lab (SAIL), conducted a comprehensive study to formulate actionable policy recommendations." **Through this research launch, Safer Internet Lab initiative will continue as going forward, we aspire to make it the regional hub for disinformation research in Southeast Asia.**

Meanwhile, Usman Kansong, Director General for Information and Public Communication at Indonesia's Ministry of Communications and Informatics explained about the overview on information disorder at the global level and also the trends in the spread of disinformation and misinformation about the election, Usman Stated that "In the 2019 Election, there was a trend in the increase of negative contents related to political/election issues on various digital platforms prior to the election." In his keynote speech he also mentioned about the regulatory landscape of handling disinformation in several countries, and the Ministry of Communications and Informatics of Republic of Indonesia adopted the The ASEAN Guideline on Management of Government Information in Combating Fake News and Disinformation in The Media.

During the presentation of the study results, Fitriani, Research Consultant, CSIS, explained the report examines and discusses Southeast Asia's responses to disinformation circulating in the region using social media. This study measures to what extent the governments of Southeast Asian countries, together with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), have addressed the issue of disinformation. The study finds that although all ASEAN states have taken initiatives to address disinformation, there is a need to engage in a multi-stakeholder, multi-faceted approach to tackle cross-border computational propaganda efforts, which become increasingly sophisticated as new technology advances. "We will gather the input and recommendations of our report, and in the later part of 2024 come out with initiatives to further address disinformation in the region, in particular mitigating the risk of the utilisation of artificial intelligence and machine learning in creating, distributing, and propagating disinformation." Fitriani said (28/03).

Mr. Jonathan Tan Ghee Tiong, Assistant Director, Culture and Information Division, ASEAN Secretariat, who was present as a panellist said agrees with the report about the aspect of critical thinking, especially for Gen Z and younger generations who are leading on TikTok for information consumption.

Mr. Miklos Gaspar, Director, UN Information Centre highlights digital platforms as a key stakeholder which have a lot of potential and power in the combat against disinformation. He stresses the need for greater transparency regarding tech platforms' data to ensure accountability and facilitate deeper understanding through rigorous research. Additionally, he suggests that ASEAN could leverage collective pressure on these platforms.

H.E. Yuyun Wahyuningrum, Representative of Indonesia to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), emphasises the importance of combining legal approaches with non-legal ones, such as advocacy, research, fact-checking, and public education, to combat disinformation effectively.

While Mr. Damar, Founder of PIKAT Demokrasi, and Advisor of Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network - SAFEnet suggests the need to include holistic perspectives from all relevant stakeholders, especially from the perspective of Civil Society Organizations who stand on the frontlines of combating disinformation.

Director of Cybersecurity and Critical Technologies, Pacific Forum in Honolulu, Hawaii, Mr. Mark Bryan Manantan, suggests that future research should involve more actors and address a broader range of issues to expand our understanding. Additionally, he recommends widening the scope of digital platforms beyond major social media platforms due to their increasing usage.

The study report can be downloaded at the following link: <https://sail.ink/asean>. The event's coverage can be accessed via the Safer Internet Lab's YouTube channel or or directly click the following link: <https://youtu.be/dgyUkf3rzs4?si=EbrfcJZqUR1wT1TJ>
