

The Rise of Symptoms of Digital Authoritarianism: Lesson from Indonesia

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Abstract

Abstract: *This paper specifically looks at the practice of repression in Indonesia's digital space, which strongly contributes to the phenomenon of digital authoritarianism in 2022. This study uses qualitative analysis with a literature study approach to clarify this assumption. The primary data from the 2021 Safenet report on digital rights in Indonesia is reinforced by relevant journals, books, and other credible online sources. This research shows that Indonesia is getting closer to the symptoms of Digital Authoritarianism with six indicator, namely the increasing criminalization experienced by citizens, journalists, and activists using the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (ITE Law), internet connection termination, online or online censorship in the form of closing certain sites without going through previous legal processes, the increasingly widespread government supervision of citizens' activities on the internet especially after the establishment of cyber police and the rise of digital thuggery on social media.*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini secara khusus membahas praktik represi di ruang digital Indonesia, yang secara kuat berkontribusi pada menguatnya fenomena otoritarianisme digital pada tahun 2022. Penelitian ini menggunakan analisis kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi literatur untuk mengklarifikasi asumsi ini. Data utama berasal dari laporan Safenet 2021 tentang hak digital di Indonesia yang diperkuat dengan jurnal, buku, dan sumber online kredibel lainnya. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa Indonesia semakin mendekati gejala Otoritarianisme Digital dengan enam indikator, yaitu meningkatnya kriminalisasi yang dialami oleh warga negara, jurnalis, dan aktivis yang menggunakan Undang-Undang Informasi dan Transaksi Elektronik (UU ITE), pemutusan koneksi internet, sensor online atau daring berupa penutupan situs tertentu tanpa melalui proses hukum yang sebelumnya, semakin meluasnya pengawasan pemerintah terhadap aktivitas warga negara di internet, terutama setelah pembentukan polisi cyber, serta meningkatnya perundungan digital di media sosial.

Introduction

Democracy in Indonesia has recently suffered a very serious setback, especially in the era of Jokowi's leadership. Several studies show the narrowing of democratic space with different terms/concepts. Some of them are democratic setback (Hadiz, 2017), democratic regression (Aspinall & Warburton, 2018), democratic decline and authoritarian turn (Power, 2018), democratic backsliding (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019b) democratic recession (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019a), illiberal democracy (Warburton & Aspinall, 2019), non-democratic pluralism (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019b), recession of democracy (Aminuddin, 2020) and authoritarian Innovations (Mietzner, 2020). Another study conducted by the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI) also showed that at least 27 of Jokowi's policies were considered to hinder civil liberties (Madrim, 2020).

All these studies show that there are serious problems with democracy in Indonesia. This trend is not only in the physical space but also in the digital space. There is a tendency for digital restrictions and repression to lead strongly to the practice of digital authoritarianism. Digital authoritarianism is the strong control over internet freedom that comes with state repression (Lilkov, 2020b; Ming-Tak & Wang, 2021; Wang, 2021; Oxford Analytica, 2022a, 2022b; Sinpeng, 2020a; Ceci & Rubin, 2022) and strongly suspected rise in Indonesia's digital public space. The rise of authoritarianism is an example of the suppression of civil liberties, including on social media, and is an indicator of the demise of democracy. This, of course, sets a bad precedent for consolidating Indonesian democracy, hindering the progress of Indonesian democracy.

Initially, the internet was expected to promote democracy by expanding public participation and enhancing government accountability (Lindquist & Huse, 2017; Yuniarta & Purnamawati, 2020; Máchová et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2019). There is very high optimism on the internet for spreading democratic values (Fukuyama, 2018). The internet has been instrumental in expanding freedom of opinion and expression, a cornerstone of democracy. Some studies also show that the internet has strengthened democracy (Christensen, 2012; Crothers, 2015; Evans, 2019; Horstink, 2017; Jha & Kodila-Tedika, 2020; Nam, 2011).

However, in reality, the internet also facilitates the destruction of democracy. First, social media is an arena for political polarization (Irawanto, 2019), spreading hoaxes (Cano-Orón et al., 2021), and bullying that occurs in the community. Second, strict controls and violence against the people carried out by the state in the digital space cause fear in the community (Suh et al., 2017; Salter, 2014). In many countries, the internet has become an arena of massive and systematic violence for people or opposition groups (Congge et al., 2023).

In Indonesia, democracy is not doing well (Sihidi, 2019). In the democracy index released by The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) in 2021, Indonesia is ranked 64th with a score of 6.3 (Putra, 2021). This value is the lowest value for the last 14 years and is categorized as a flawed democracy. None of the 11 ASEAN member states is considered to have implemented full democracy until 2021. Most 6 ASEAN countries are categorized as disabled democracies: Malaysia, Timor Leste, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, and Singapore. According to the EIU, countries that fall into flawed democracies generally

already have free and fair electoral systems and respect basic civil liberties rights. However, in flawed democracies, the level of freedom still tends to be low. In addition, the political culture tends to be anti-critical, the political participation of citizens is weak, and the government's performance has not been optimal. In 2022, Indonesia achieved a Democracy Index score 6.71, with no change from the previous year. Although still classified as flawed, Indonesia's democracy score is the 4th highest in ASEAN, which is quite good compared to neighboring countries.

Jokowi has indeed inherited democratic conditions that are also unsatisfactory. At the end of SBY's leadership in 2014, Indonesian democracy entered the stagnant category. However, under Jokowi's leadership, especially in the second era, the quality of Indonesian democracy has decreased significantly. This began with the government coalition controlling 81.9% of seats in the DPR, leaving little room for opposition. As a result, power control was weakened, and many of Jokowi's controversial government policies could finally escape. Unfortunately, non-parliamentary opposition groups were repressed. Many parties feel the nuances of Jokowi's leadership are anti-democratic.

A study from LP3ES explains the anti-democratic principle in more detail (Akbar, 2020). First, there is an attempt to muzzle political opponents of the regime that leads. Second, there are restrictions on civil liberties through the use of Law Number 11 of 2008 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE) to ensnare critical voices. Third, tolerance for violence. Fourth is that commitments to democratic rules are broken.

Furthermore, the EIU Index is measured from five indicators, one of which is related to civil liberties. The amount of digital repression that occurs is one of the reasons why civil liberties are falling in Indonesia. The practice strongly leads to digital authoritarianism, with the main perpetrators being state actors or groups of people with the main perpetrators being state actors or groups acting on behalf of the state. These activities are part of restrictions and repressive measures in the form of restrictions on freedom of assembly and expression. Unfortunately, many of these repressive measures were not processed further and transparently by the police. This highlights a failure of state accountability. Digital authoritarianism refers to governments using technology and digital tools to control citizens and suppress dissent (Sherman, 2021). Additionally, there have been reports of internet censorship, including blocking websites and removing content deemed critical of the government. The government has also been accused of using cybersecurity laws to justify online speech restrictions and target government critics.

In Indonesia, there have been concerns about digital authoritarianism, particularly regarding using social media to spread misinformation and monitor citizens (Safe net, 2022). The Indonesian government has been accused of using social media to silence opposition voices and to spread propaganda. Critics argue that these actions undermine freedom of expression and erode democratic norms, while the government defends its actions as necessary to maintain stability and security in the country. Nevertheless, digital authoritarianism remains a growing concern in Indonesia, with civil society groups and international organizations calling for greater transparency and accountability in government use of technology and digital tools.

As far as the study's authors, research on the practice of digital authoritarianism has been carried out by many researchers. Still, not many have seen specific specifications in the Indonesian context. The studies focused on other countries, namely China (Mattingly, 2019; Lilkov, 2020a; Khalil, 2021) Russian (Morgus, 2019; Toepfl, 2018), Zimbabwe (Puyosa, 2021; Mare, 2020), Venezuela (Puyosa, 2021), Costa Rica (Bunse, 2020), India (Campbell-Smith & Bradshaw, 2019), Vietnam (Nguyen & Luong, 2021), Thailand (Sinpeng, 2020b), Belarusia (Cebul & Pinckney, 2022), Iran (Wessels, 2019), and Singapore (Tan, 2020). All of these studies share the same conclusion that all digital repression aims to empower government through suppression of critical and opposition groups. The opposition is considered a potentially disruptive force and that has been proven in many countries. Therefore, one of them must be subdued through social media channels because it is considered to be one of the channels in carrying out resistance.

This article focuses on how the state/power practices massive and systematic restrictions and violence through social media as a public space. Indirectly, this resulted in a decline in civil liberties in Indonesia in 2020 and 2021 due to restrictions imposed by the state on social media. In particular, there is a systematic effort to weaken critical groups, including civil society organizations, that protest against state policies perceived as contrary to the public interest.

While previous studies have examined digital authoritarianism at a global level, there remains a significant gap in research specifically addressing this phenomenon in the Indonesian context. This study aims to bridge that gap by analyzing the patterns of authoritarian practices occurring in Indonesia's digital space. This focus is not only crucial for understanding the dynamics of democracy in Indonesia but also offers valuable insights into how digital technologies are increasingly employed as tools of state control and repression in the modern era?

Research Method

Digital repression in Indonesia has escalated, aligning closely with characteristics of digital authoritarianism. To clarify this assumption, this study uses a type of quality research: a literature study. The main data obtained through literature studies, especially from the 2021 Safenet report on Digital Rights in Indonesia entitled "The Pandemic is Controlled But Digital Repression Continues". This report serves as a key foundation for the research, as it specifically highlights various forms of digital repression in Indonesia, including restrictions on freedom of expression, content removal, and threats against critical groups. The significance of Safenet's report lies in its ability to offer a clear and comprehensive depiction of how digital authoritarianism is evolving in Indonesia. Additionally, the report serves as an essential reference for understanding how this phenomenon connects to global trends.

In addition to the Safenet report, this study also utilizes various supplementary sources such as books, academic journals, news articles, magazines, and other online references. All sources were carefully selected to ensure their relevance to the topic and to provide broader perspectives on digital repression in Indonesia. This research employs a descriptive approach to analyze the data. This approach enables the author to explore in depth how

digital repression systematically occurs within Indonesia's public sphere, which ideally should uphold democratic values. Through this method, the study not only explains the phenomenon from a theoretical stand, in this case to see in reality how digital repression occurs in Indonesian public spaces that adhere to a democratic system.

Results and Discussion

Symptoms of digital authoritarianism in indonesia

In Indonesia, the number of internet users continues to show significant growth every year. In 2022, 77 percent of Indonesia's population used the internet. This number equals 210 million and increased by 35 million compared to the previous year, before the pandemic. Pandemic conditions that result in social restrictions so that people spend a lot of time at home are among the main factors driving the increase in internet consumption in Indonesia. However, internet equality in Indonesia has not been perfect. This gap is visible because around 23 percent of the population still cannot access the internet.

This fact should be read as an opportunity for improving democratic quality because it makes it easier for people to be actively involved in political and development activities. It will be easier for the public to participate in politics, especially to control various state policies, which are the key to increasing government accountability. High public participation is crucial for strengthening Indonesian democracy, which still faces many challenges. The internet, through social media, can be a channel for people to demand justice when state officials do not follow normal procedures. Social media that provides easy access can be a strategic door for the community to maximize the function of supervision and examination in various policy and development programs carried out by the government. Social media has proven to be a powerful depressing force as it can rapidly shape public opinion, gather strength, and organize and carry out protests efficiently and effectively.

However, on the other hand, the state (Indonesia) still fails to fulfill the digital rights of its citizens. Digital rights include the right to access the internet, the right to free expression, and the right to security in the digital realm. This can be seen in several digital rights violations, including restrictions on Internet access, criminalization of the expression of actors outside the state, especially opposition, and politically motivated digital attacks. This shows that the government is not serious about providing security for its citizens in the digital space.

The digital space in Indonesia is indeed in trouble. Freedom of association, which should have been strengthened in the digital space, has regressed. Strong and surging pressure is experienced both from the public (political buzzer) and the government itself when criticizing government policies. A political buzzer can be defined as an individual or group that deliberately uses social media and other digital platforms to spread propaganda, hoaxes, or misleading narratives for specific political interests. They often operate with manipulative intentions, such as shaping public opinion, attacking political opponents, or silencing criticism against the parties or individuals they support. Instead, the internet was used as a tool of repression to suppress criticism from the opposition. The massive and systematic

pattern indicates that this attack is well-organized and deliberate" for conciseness. There is a huge force driving this attack. This can be seen from, for example, buzzer activities that are strongly suspected to be controlled and protected by the state in bullying using stick and carrot methods, labeling, and framing critical civil society groups or movements.

In recent years, the digital public space in Indonesia has narrowed so that it is categorized very close to the symptoms of digital authoritarianism (Alfiansyah, 2021). First, the increasing criminalization experienced by citizens, journalists, and activists using the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (ITE Law). This law has 3 articles of rubber (articles 27-29). One of the problematic articles in question is still related to Article 27, paragraph 3 concerning defamation. This article is said to be used to curb the expression activities of citizens, activists, and journalists. It also reined citizens from criticizing the police and government. Data from Safenet shows that from 2008 to 2021, there were 372 cases of the ITE Law (Safe net, 2022). Referring to the same institution, in 2020, public officials committed 47 cases of public punishment using the ITE Law (Jayani, 2021). In addition, threats and attacks against human rights defenders are also increasing, especially using digital technology. Based on SAFEnet monitoring, throughout 2021, there were at least 193 incidents of digital attacks. This number is up 38% compared to the previous year's (2020) incidents of 147. During that one year, the peak of attacks occurred in September 2021 with 34 incidents (18%), followed by May (26 incidents) and June (21 incidents). The lowest attacks occurred in December (5 incidents) and August (5 incidents).

This case highlights the vulnerability of human rights activists to criminalization under the pretext of defamation. Amnesty International Indonesia recorded that at least 1,021 human rights defenders experienced prosecutions, arrests, attacks, and threats from various parties in the period from January 2019 to December 2022. In the same time frame, 332 people were charged under the ITE Law, mostly using defamation charges (Nur, 2023).

The criminalization experienced by human rights activists is part of efforts to silence civil freedom. This further shows the arrogance of power because it is anti-criticism and arbitrary to citizens. KontraS noted at least 107 attacks and threats to human rights defense work between December 2022 and November 2023. This portrait shows that human rights defenders are still considered enemies of the state whose existence is considered a threat.

Second, the government terminates internet connections under the pretext of security. This happened 3 times in 2019, namely in Jakarta on May 22-24, 2019, then in Papua and West Papua on August 21, 2019, and on September 23-29, 2019, in Wamena and Jayapura (SAFEnet, 2020). In the case of Jakarta, the slowdown and internet blocking are related to demonstrations that led to riots against the results of the 2019 Presidential Election, which were considered full of fraud. In the provinces of Papua and West Papua, including Jayapura City, Jayapura Regency, Mimika Regency, and Jayawijaya Regency, the termination was related to violent protests (demonstrations) against acts of racism that occurred against Papuan Papuan students in Surabaya and Malang, East Java involving police officers. The

case did trigger a wave of wide-scale protests that the government responded to through internet cuts under the pretext of controlling the flow of hoax information that could muddy the atmosphere.

Limiting internet access is one of the effective steps in controlling the flow of information in the community. This can hinder citizens' ability to share information and seek news outside official sources, making it easier for governments to create effective official narratives to follow. The narrative certainly supports the government's version of view or truth.

In the context of Papua's ongoing social conflict, the government argues that it is intended for several things. First, control the narrative. The government aims to control conflicts by shaping narratives according to its own rules. The goal is to influence public perception, gain support, or defuse potential tensions. Second, avoid provocation. The Papuan conflict then resulted in many provocations on social media, contributing to the escalation of the conflict that continued to grow. Therefore, controlling the internet at that time aimed to reduce provocations so that tensions likely to trigger emotional reactions or aggressive actions from the public could be minimized.

Third, build public opinion. Information control is also used to build public opinion that supports the government's handling of issues and prevents the formation of public opinion voiced by rioters. Fourth, control misleading information. The government claims a lot of hoax information about the conflict in Papua that can muddy the atmosphere, so it needs to be localized. The goal is to prevent the spread of false information and propaganda that will likely make the atmosphere more uncontrollable. The government needs to monopolize information so that the process of creating order can be carried out.

The problem is that in the context of the Papua conflict, the control of information makes the government monopolize the truth of information. Information different from the government is considered misguided and bad news because it is detrimental to the government's image. The perpetrators are threatened with crime even though there is no valid proof of the truth of the information. Gradually, it turned out that the information was true. All of these things show one of the characteristics of an anti-democratic regime of power because it closes the presence of other alternative information.

These activities turned out to be unlawful. This is evidenced by the decision of the Jakarta State Administrative Court (PTUN) stating that President Joko Widodo and the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology were found guilty of blocking or slowing down internet connections in Papua in mid-2019. Both are considered to have been proven to have committed unlawful acts due to the internet restrictions. Activists say internet slowdowns and cuts in Papua are accused of violating several legal provisions, including Law 40/1999 on the Press and Law 12/2005 regulating freedom of seeking, receiving, and informing. Ade said the Ministry of Information and Communication's

(Kominfo) claim to prevent the spread of fake news, along with riots that occurred last August in several cities in Papua, caused information confusion.

The blocking hindered media outlets' ability to verify information effectively. As a result, information outside Papua continues circulating, while journalists in Papua cannot clarify what is circulating in Jakarta. Activists also stated that Indonesia has followed several countries whose democracies have problems carrying out internet cutoffs, such as China (Lilkov, 2020c), India (Momen et al., 2020), and Zimbabwe (Puyosa, 2021; Mare, 2020).

Furthermore, in 2021, there were 12 disruptions to internet access in Papua, which civil society activists strongly suspected were closely related to ongoing social conflicts (Safe net, 2022). Of the 12 cases, 8 are strongly suspected of being related to conflicts involving the state, society, and armed groups. Furthermore, there are allegations that these cases are related to a series of digital attacks suffered by several activists and journalists in Papua and West Papua. For example, the doxing incident against Jubi's editor, the distribution of fake SMS on behalf of the Papua Legal Aid Institute (LBH) and Kingmi Church that the Free Papua Organization (OPM) that shot two teachers in Beoga were terrorists and human rights violators, as well as hacking attempts by logging into Telegram groups by falsifying identities.

In 2021, SafeNet data also recorded several Papuan activists and politicians charged with rubber articles of the ITE Law, starting from Soon Tabuni in Timika, West Papua, found guilty of violating or committing criminal acts in Article 45A Paragraph 2. Article 55, paragraph (1) of the Criminal Code. He was sentenced to 6 months in prison and fined IDR 1 billion on April 23, 2021. Assa Asso is a filmmaker and photographer charged with treason because his Facebook posts about the unrest were seen as an attempt against the state. Manuel Metemko in Merauke, West Papua, was arrested by a joint Indonesia Army (TNI) and Indonesian National Police (Polri) team called Task Force Nemangkawi in Merauke Regency for spreading hoaxes, provocative stories, and hate online through his Facebook page. Law enforcement officials arrested him on June 9, 2021.

Third, online censorship is in the form of closing certain sites without going through previous legal processes. For example, through the Ministry of Communication and Information, since 2019, the government has closed thousands of sites that are considered to have piracy content and dozens of sites that are claimed to promote racist and provocative content. The lack of transparency and absence of clear indicators make these actions appear politically motivated. In this context, the blocking has had a significant impact on the erosion of human rights, namely the right to communicate and obtain information, as well as the right to freedom of expression and the right to privacy as stipulated in the 1945 Constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Such actions ignore accountability, resulting in inequality in access to information violating the basic principles of democracy, namely freedom of speech and individual rights.

Internet access restrictions must, therefore, be regulated by law and can only be applied in minimal circumstances following international legal standards regarding human rights. Moreover, it also reduces public access to alternative sources of information from independent media. In the context of government-monopolized sources of information, these alternative sources are very useful for providing other truths. The case of closing several alternative media during social conflicts occurred in Papua, which were considered to be spreading hoaxes when they could be used as evidence.

Fourth, the increasingly widespread government supervision of citizens' activities on the internet, especially after the establishment of cyber police by the police. This cyber police makes people more worried about freedom of expression in the digital space as evidenced by a survey that shows 34% of Indonesians are worried that virtual police will further threaten freedom of expression ([Maharani, 2021](#)).

In the fight against cybercrime, cyber police may have access to personal data or sensitive information. The use of such data should be closely monitored to prevent misuse and invasion of privacy. In addition, the use of excessive force. The power and authority wielded by cyber police can be abused or used disproportionately. This can jeopardize individual freedoms and the rights of citizens.

This has met with stiff resistance from civil society as it increasingly represents a new phase of authoritarianism. This conclusion is reasonable, considering that a model like this poses a significant risk of giving rise to digital paranoctica, a term used to describe a condition where efforts are made to discipline citizens through virtual alerts in the digital realm, prompting immediate corrections. This policy does not provide much benefit related to democracy and will only cause new fears for the people ([Firmansyah, 2021](#); [Sari, 2021](#)).

This fear is further reinforced by the fact that the symptoms of cyber police activity are more political because they process more content that spreads information critical of the government. This makes civil society's concern about cyber police as an extension of the government in silencing criticism of them even stronger. In addition, the existence of cyber police is also still minimal interactive (deliberation) in digital public spaces, marked by the absence of admin responses to various netizen comments. Its presence has also not protected pro-democracy activists who are victims of digital crime despite the support of a large budget.

Fifth, digital thuggery on social media. Digital thuggery is a series of cyber acts of terror that carry out trolling, doxing, and hacking. All of these actions are forms of digital violence that, on the scale of power operations, are intended to silence criticism from the opposition. The state has been criticized for cyber terror attacks on activists as symptomatic of the narrowing of Indonesia's digital public space. Several cyber terror attacks, such as cyber-attacks on academics who rejected the revision of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) Law in 2019, the hacking of activist Ravio Patra's WhatsApp in 2020, death threats

against Gadjah Mada University students who planned to attend a discussion in 2020, and the hacking of the Twitter account of an epidemiologist who was said to have criticized government policies related to Covid-19. All of this violence is also often horizontal, namely occurring among people with the presence of political buzzers that are strongly suspected to be deliberately moved by the state to counter-narratives against civil society and doxing.

The situation related to digital security and safety also shows the same thing. 2021 is still marked by rampant digital attacks on civil society, especially critical groups, such as journalists, activists, and other human rights defenders ([Safe net, 2022](#)). Two of them are the hacking of anti-corruption activists in May 2021 and the hacking of former employees of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) in September 2021. Critical media outlets, such as WatchDoc's Instagram account and Indoproggress website impersonation, were also hacked. Throughout 2021, there were at least 193 incidents of digital attacks. This number is up 38% compared to the previous year's incident, which had 147 incidents. The peak of attacks occurred in September (34 incidents), higher than the average of attacks each month, about 16 incidents. The high number of attacks in the highest three months of September, May, and June remained inseparable from the national political situation during the year, especially the National Insight Test (TWK) on KPK staff. All of these attacks have the same characteristics that affect those who are critical of government policy. They are activists, journalists and media, students, and civil society organizations exhibiting an increasingly political nature. Total attacks on these four groups reached 58.95%.

The condition of global democracy has recently experienced a significant decline - one of which is measured by the narrowing of civil liberties ([Ramadhan, F. S. et al., 2021](#)). Specifically, this is seen not only in Indonesia but also in Southeast Asia. Some Southeast Asian governments use innovative cyber repression to strengthen and consolidate their authoritarian power ([Sinpeng, 2021](#)). Social media, which should strengthen democracy, is used by the ruling regime to silence freedom of expression ([Sinpeng & Koh, 2022](#)). The digital space is proving to be an effective means for power to paralyze democracy through sustained and highly organized repression of the opposition.

The phenomenon of digital repression has been going on since 2013. This marks a new evolution of the authoritarianism model by narrowing citizens' space in the online sphere with the repression that comes through digital technology. This began with strengthening the intelligence operations of Western countries, including democratic regimes, to monitor the political activities of their people through the internet. One of them is through control over information entering and leaving the country. Information censorship aims to filter important information that harms the government so it does not reach the public. It is considered an effective strategy for the defense of power because the internet can be an effective channel for large-scale protest movements for power. By controlling information, the government can maintain its good image in the public eye.

Gradually, the digital repression model continues to develop through various modes. If initially through effective information censorship, such a pattern is already very difficult to use, especially in democratic regimes where the level of freedom of use of the internet is increasing. The authorities understand that it is necessary to adapt new models of repression, some of which are carried out legally through various laws. In some countries, a special kind of law threatens people's freedom of expression in cyberspace. For example, in Indonesia, the ITE Law has ensnared many critical groups under the pretext of defamation for protesting problematic state policies and officials.

Furthermore, the use of cyber troops became the usual mode used. This is evident in Indonesia and Thailand, where cyber troops such as buzzers strongly suspected to be affiliated with the state carry out character archery against individuals or opposition groups. In addition, hacking WhatsApp accounts aimed at disrupting the communication process of critical groups is also a pattern that is often used.

Analysis Political researchers Tiberiu Dragu of New York University and Yonatan Lupu of George Washington University show that technological innovation has increased abuse to prevent opposition groups from moving (Dragu & Lupu, 2021). Technological advances have also increased the likelihood of authoritarians succeeding in crippling opposition. The digital revolution has facilitated governments and authoritarian institutions to easily monitor people's activities, especially on social media, curbing freedom of expression and other civil liberties.

Then what about Indonesia? The repression of technology, the main character of digital authoritarianism, is increasingly visible, especially in the 2nd period of Jokowi's leadership. This can be proven by referring to the Internet Freedom Index, which continues to fall every year from 2017 to 2021. Furthermore, in 2022, the Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network (SAFE net) noted that digital freedom in Indonesia is worse than in 2021, which has entered the "alert 2" category (Safe net, 2022). Digital freedom in Indonesia is only halfway from alert level to "alert," which means Indonesia continues to move towards digital authoritarianism if no significant improvements are made. The digital repression that occurred increasingly showed one of the original characteristics of Jokowi's leadership, which was anti-democratic.

The question is why Jokowi's era, which was at the beginning of his leadership, was considered to bring new hope. Instead, there was co-optation and weakening of public participation on social media. Even though Jokowi's victory in the 2012 DKI Jakarta Regional Election, 2014 and 2019 Presidential Elections occurred because of Jokowi's shrewdness in maximizing efficient and effective creative campaigns on social media, this means that social media contributed to Jokowi's victory in the contestation that has been followed. The answer to the decline is inseparable from the fact that during the Jokowi era, the public criticized many problematic government policies. These policies, such as the Revision of the KPK Law, the Criminal Code (KHUP), and the handling of the Papua conflict, have received a lot of

negative sentiment from the public because they are considered not partial to the community. Jokowi's power is disturbed by this, resulting in the repression of critical groups.

Control over the internet, which is realized by the regime, is one of the strategic steps in securing the status quo. The internet can be a medium for consolidating public protests that can expand quickly and strongly affect the government. In this context, if public anxiety is not managed properly and continues to grow through social media, it will destroy the leadership of the ruling regime, in this case, president Jokowi. Therefore, controlling the internet becomes an essential strategy for maintaining power.

The critical group used social media, especially Twitter (X), Instagram, and YouTube, to launch their protests. In addition, consolidation of power also takes place through WhatsApp groups to gather power. Therefore, it is natural that social media is the most frequent place of repression. The repression against them is quite originating, considering they are influential figures. Their reputation as intellectuals whose opinions influence the public and their various kinds make them targets of repression. They significantly shape public opinion and influence the organization of protests.

The Indonesian government may or may not have learned lessons from some cases of the usefulness of social media in aiding the process of public resistance. Social media facilitated widespread protests and proved successful in some countries in bringing down regimes, as in the Arab Spring (Nasrallah & Sarkis, 2020; Karolak, 2020; Smidi & Shahin, 2017). Then, protests against the extradition bill were initiated by the younger generation of Hong Kong (Sutan et al., 2021). All these studies show how effective social media is in facilitating people's resistance movements.

Studies have also shown that social media has played a significant role in the success of social movements in various parts of the world. Some of the main benefits of social media in the context of social movements are, first, mobilization and organizing. Social media has successfully created social movements to organize supporters quickly and efficiently, coordinate activities, and disseminate information. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram can unite the masses in no time—second, individual empowerment. Social media is successfully giving a voice to individuals who previously might not have gotten the attention of traditional media. This breeds active participation from individuals, provides a feeling of empowerment, and motivates them to get involved in social movements.

Third, increased awareness. Social media created a social movement to disseminate information quickly to a wider audience. Viral campaigns and content have helped raise awareness of social issues and create momentum among the public. Fourth, public engagement. Social media platforms create a two-way dialogue between social movements and society. This creates opportunities to listen to feedback, understand concerns, and build further support from the public. Fifth, Solidarity and Networking. Social media strengthens solidarity, forming wider networks because of its message.

In the Indonesian context, digital repression has occurred in 3 aspects: the right to access the internet, the right to free expression, and the right to a sense of security in the digital realm. This fact further strengthens the digital authoritarianism movement. In the context of civil society, academia, and critical media as policy opponents, this group is particularly vulnerable to attack because many do not have digital security standards. Generally, they experience social media hacking, intimidation in the form of doxing, and the deployment of cyber armies led by key opinion leaders (KOLs).

Prediction of such patterns is very likely to continue. The increasingly anti-democratic character of power will perceive social media as an important threat to the existence of power. Moreover, the number of internet users continues to increase, which is a great opportunity for the public to use social media to articulate protests. Social media will thus continue to be a fierce battle for critical public participation and silencing from the state.

Conclusion

The internet, once expected to expand democracy and strengthen public participation, has instead transformed into an arena of violence, undermining democratic principles. This study highlights that, during Jokowi's leadership, despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression, the suppression of civil liberties in cyberspace has become increasingly widespread and difficult to control. The rise of digital authoritarianism poses a significant threat to public participation, showcasing the state's sophisticated methods of repressing opposition, particularly on social media platforms. The state's emphasis on controlling the internet reflects a strategic effort to neutralize opposition and shield its policies from public criticism.

State-sponsored violence in virtual spaces has effectively instilled fear and silenced dissent. This research demonstrates how such measures have stifled political expression and activism, eroding public confidence in voicing criticism. The findings highlight the importance of mastering the internet as a critical tool for civil society to effectively resist authoritarian practices and sustain social movements. Furthermore, this study indicates that digital repression in Indonesia remains persistent, with patterns evolving beyond 2021. The findings emphasize the need for comparative studies with other countries to better understand the global implications of digital authoritarianism. Future research should prioritize long-term data collection to track these developments and devise effective strategies for countering repression in digital spaces.

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