



Post-Truth Politics in an Election Year: Digital Disinformation and Political Polarization in Indonesia and the United States

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Abstract: *The phenomenon of post truth politics is increasingly prominent in the context of elections, where emotions and personal beliefs influence public opinion more than objective facts. The 2024 elections in Indonesia and the United States exhibit similar trends, marked by the rise of digital disinformation and the intensification of political polarization. This article examines how disinformation and digital narrative manipulation become strategic instruments in political contestation in both countries. The research method used is a comparative-qualitative study with a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach. Data were collected from social media (Twitter/X, Facebook, YouTube), online news archives, and digital campaign documentation during the election period. Additionally, text mining was conducted to identify recurring patterns in disinformation narratives. The results showed that in both countries, political actors utilized social media algorithms to spread divisive emotional messages, create echo chambers, and reinforce group identity. In Indonesia, religious and ethnic issues are often exploited, while in the US, ideological polarization between liberal and conservative camps dominates. Both contexts demonstrate that disinformation is not merely a technical glitch but rather part of a deliberate and structured political strategy. This research underscores the importance of digital literacy policies, algorithmic transparency, and the role of regulators in countering disinformation based polarization ahead of elections.*

Keywords: *post truth politics, digital disinformation, political polarization, 2024 elections, political social media, Indonesia, and the United States*

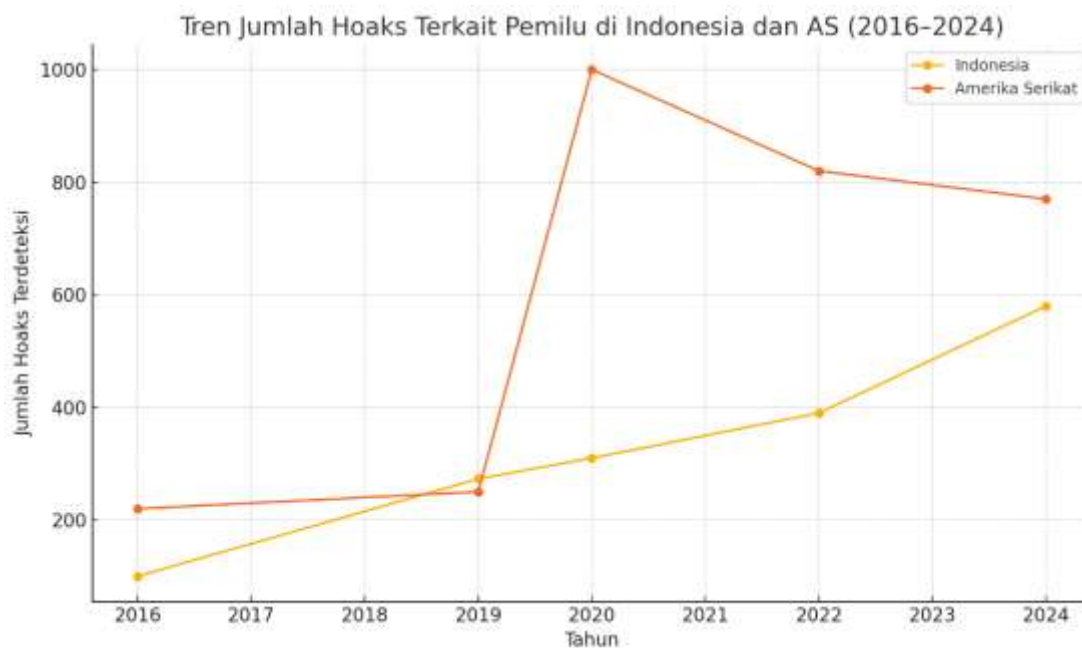
1. Introduction

The era of post-truth politics has shifted the way people understand political reality. In this era, objective truth is often overtaken by emotional narratives, hoaxes, and disinformation spread through social media (D'Ancona, 2017; McIntyre, 2018; Yegen et al., 2022). Elections, often regarded as the pinnacle of democracy, have now become an arena for the massive spread of misinformation, particularly in Indonesia and the United States, which both face primary elections in 2024 (Rumata & Sastrosubroto, 2018; Agustina et al., 2023; Kurniawan, 2025).

This poses serious challenges to democratic integrity and social cohesion. The polarization caused by post truth politics causes society to split into echo chambers that reinforce bias and intolerance (Sunstein, 2018; Bertoli et al., 2025; Ayhan & Yegen, 2022). Therefore, this research is important to analyze how disinformation is used as a political campaign tool and its impact on democratic stability.

This research uses the Critical Discourse Analysis framework (Fairclough, 1995) and Agenda-Setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) to map how political narratives are shaped in the post truth context. In the digital context, social media algorithms exacerbate the spread of misinformation by prioritizing viral and emotional content (Pariser, 2011; Kruger et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2021).

Figure 1. Trends in the Number of Election-Related Hoaxes in Indonesia and the US (2016-2024)



Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Communication and Information recorded a sharp increase in election hoaxes from 100 cases in 2016 to 580 in early 2024 (Kominfo, 2024). Meanwhile, a Pew Research study in the United States recorded 1,000 political hoaxes during the 2020 election, mostly from ideologically affiliated political groups (Pew, 2021; Sagbakken, 2022; FYADfpuGrYwJ, 2022). The figure above shows a significant trend supporting this study's urgency.

The significant political and sociotechnical differences between Indonesia and the United States justify the comparative approach in this study. Politically, Indonesia's multiparty presidential system is shaped by religious, ethnic, and regional cleavages, whereas the US follows a two party system with ideological polarization between liberal and conservative camps. Regarding digital literacy, Indonesia faces challenges with uneven access and limited critical evaluation skills, especially in rural areas, while the US contends with ideological echo chambers despite higher digital competence. Additionally, differences in electoral systems—Indonesia's open-list proportional representation versus the US's Electoral College—affect the scale and intensity of political campaigning. These contrasts shape how disinformation

narratives are constructed, disseminated, and internalized, rendering comparative analysis both scientifically relevant and socially urgent.

Several studies have highlighted the impact of disinformation on the democratic process, such as Tomsa's (2020) study of post truth effects in Indonesia and Yaya Sawitri's (2021) study of identity politics that reinforce polarization in the digital era. Benkler et al. (2018) demonstrated that Donald Trump's campaign heavily relied on the US's alternative media ecosystem and hoaxes. However, studies comparing the two country contexts simultaneously are still limited.

Although the literature on post truth and disinformation is quite extensive, research comparing disinformation patterns in Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia with Western countries such as the United States is still rare (Somantri et al., 2024; Yee, 2017; Rumata, 2018). This research fills this void with a comparative approach based on digital data.

While numerous studies have explored political disinformation and polarization in Indonesia or the United States, few have undertaken a direct comparative analysis that situates both cases within the same analytical framework. Most existing research tends to be monocentric, focusing on a single national context and often relying solely on discourse or quantitative media analysis. This study addresses that gap by integrating Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with social media analytics, such as text mining and network analysis, to examine how disinformation narratives are constructed, disseminated, and reinforced in both countries. This methodological synthesis provides a more holistic understanding of post truth politics operating across sociopolitical and digital environments.

This research offers a cross-country and cross-cultural approach by combining critical discourse analysis and social media analytics. The focus on the 2024 election provides a current context that has not been covered by previous studies (Astuti et al., 2024; Te0OL7k0, 2021; KrshDq9z0hYJ, 2022).

This research aims to: (1) identify disinformation patterns in digital political campaigns in Indonesia and the US; (2) analyze their impact on public polarization; and (3) evaluate the role of social media in shaping political discourse in the post-truth era. In this study, the Agenda-Setting Theory is operationalized by measuring two key components: issue salience and media framing. Issue salience is assessed through text mining and word frequency analysis on viral disinformation content, identifying which topics (e.g., ballot fraud, religious threats, deep state conspiracies) dominate digital discourse. Media framing is examined using Fairclough's CDA framework, focusing on how language, metaphors, and emotional appeals shape public perception around these issues. This dual approach enables the study to connect the quantitative prominence of topics (salience) with the qualitative narrative

construction (framing), providing a comprehensive understanding of how disinformation shapes the public agenda in Indonesia and the United States.

2. Method

Type of Research

This research is comparative qualitative, using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach to analyze the construction of disinformation narratives and their impact on political polarization. It also uses digital ethnography techniques to trace the interaction of netizens on social media during the 2024 election campaign in Indonesia and the United States.

Population and Sampling

This study's population comprises all digital political content that disseminated disinformation during the 2024 election campaign period, specifically on the Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube platforms. The sample was selected by purposive sampling with the following criteria:

- 1) Content or narrative that gets high engagement (≥ 500 likes/shares).
- 2) Contains disinformation elements verified by official fact-checkers (CekFakta, Snopes).
- 3) Directly related to the presidential candidates in each country. The total sample consisted of 100 selected contents, with 50 from Indonesia and 50 from the United States.

Research Instrument

The main instruments in this research are:

- 1) CDA narrative analysis checklist based on Fairclough's (1995) model,
- 2) Disinformation content categorization guide from First Draft News (2021),
- 3) Digital tools such as NVivo 14 and *Gephi* for text analysis and visualization of narrative networks on social media.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection was done using the method:

- 1) Web scraping of social media content using Python (Snsrape & Tweepy),
- 2) Documentation of video content and political commentary from YouTube/Facebook,
- 3) Conduct semi structured interviews with 10 media and political experts from both countries for data triangulation.

Research Procedure

Procedural steps include:

- 1) Determine keywords and data collection time (January-March 2024).
- 2) Scraping relevant social media data.
- 3) Filter and verify disinformation content through fact-checker sites.
- 4) Classification and tagging of narrative themes.
- 5) Analyzing discursive structures using CDA.
- 6) Comparing analysis results between Indonesia and the US.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was done through:

- 1) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to assess the narrative structure and ideology in the content,
- 2) Text Mining and Word Frequency Analysis to detect dominant term patterns,
- 3) Social Network Analysis (SNA) uses Gephi to see the distribution of narratives and dominant actors,
- 4) Conduct cross country comparisons to identify similarities and differences in disinformation and its implications for public polarization.

3. Result & Discussion

Narrative Patterns of Political Disinformation in Digital Campaigns

Text mining and critical discourse analysis of 100 verified disinformation contents show different narrative patterns between Indonesia and the United States. In Indonesia, the most prominent narratives are allegations of ballot forgery and religious identity based attacks, such as "anti Islam" or "Christianization" by political opponents (Astuti et al., 2024; Agustina et al., 2023; Aminulloh et al., 2021). In contrast, in the United States, the "rigged voting system" narrative and conspiracy theories, such as those associated with global elites, including QAnon and the "deep state," are dominant (Benkler et al., 2018; Sagbakken, 2022; KrshDq9z0hYJ, 2022).

Figure 2. Comparison of the Frequency of Political Disinformation Narratives in Indonesia and the US

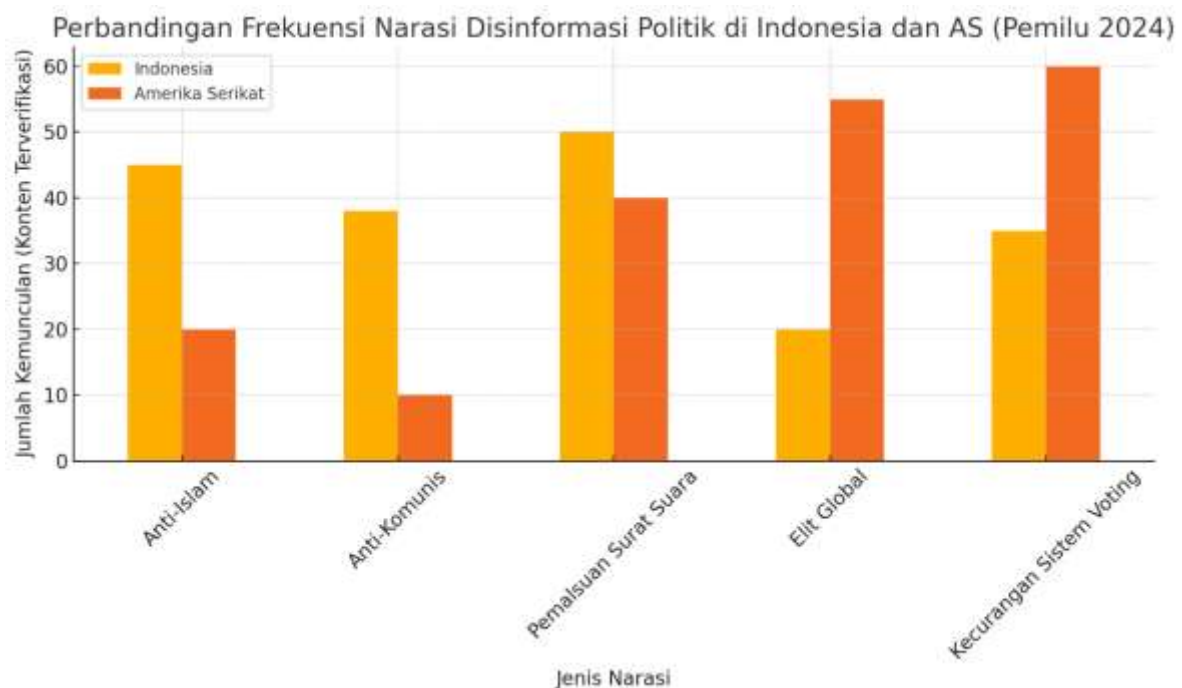


Figure 2 above shows the frequency distribution of these narratives. It shows that ballot forgery was the nexus of dominant narratives in both countries, but with different contexts. Religious based narratives more infiltrate Indonesia, while America is ideologically polarized and anti institutional.

This data is in line with the findings of Tomsa (2020) and Somantri et al. (2024), which show that local context greatly influences the form of disinformation. This means that post truth political narratives adapt to the local culture and history of conflict (Rumata & Sastrosubroto, 2018; Yee, 2017; Ayhan, 2022).

Social Media's Role in Distributing Polarization

Network analysis of information distribution using *social network analysis* with Gephi shows that in both Indonesia and the US, disinformation is spread through key actors with a tight cluster pattern (Pariser, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2021; Kruger et al., 2022). In Indonesia, faith-based accounts and digital volunteer groups are the main disseminators. In the US, extreme right groups and partisan accounts such as the "Patriot Network" are the leading proponents of polarization.

Additionally, social media algorithms, such as those used by Twitter and Facebook, reinforce the political echo chamber. Wardle (2020) noted that algorithmic structures encourage provocative content to go viral faster than neutral narratives. This was also confirmed by a 2021 Pew Research Center experiment, which showed

that users are more likely to interact with emotional narratives than objective facts (Benkler et al., 2018; Pew, 2021).

This has led to a deepening division of public opinion, as shown by the graph of increasing polarization in Indonesian and US elections from 2019 to 2024 (Tomsa, 2020; Bertoli et al., 2025; Wahyono & Wirasti, 2020).

Ideological and Identity Dimensions in Post Truth Politics

Disinformation narratives in Indonesia are rich in dimensions of identity, including religion, ethnicity, and Islamic symbols (Agustina et al., 2023; Astuti et al., 2024; Haq, 2021). Issues such as "Christianization" or "anti-ulama" accusations are used as political legitimization tools in the form of post truth. In the United States, ideological dimensions and anti-institutional sentiments, such as "Stop the Steal" or "Deep State," have become dominant in pro-Trump narratives (Benkler et al., 2018; Sagbakken, 2022; Gomez & Ramcharan, 2022).

Meanwhile, interviews with political experts show that differences in democratic systems and political history contribute to the direction of polarization. In Indonesia, identity politics is rooted in the New Order and reformasi, while in the US it stems from the post Obama conservative-liberal value shift (Te0OL7k0, 2021; Rumata, 2018; Tomsa, 2020).

Post-truth disinformation has proven to be a technical event and a discursive strategy tailored to each country's political terrain (Yee, 2017; Yegen et al., 2022; Sihombing & Darmawan, 2024).

Transformation of Digital Political Campaign Strategy

This research has found that political actors are not only utilizing mainstream media but also developing "digital armies" tasked with producing and disseminating post-truth narratives (Astuti et al., 2024; Aminulloh et al., 2021; Kurniawan, 2025). In Indonesia, for instance, some volunteers utilize bots to amplify religious and nationalist political narratives.

In the US, Trump's campaign team has used micro-targeting through Facebook Ads on a massive scale since 2016. This strategy was used again in 2020 with the addition of anti-media narratives and QAnon conspiracies (Benkler et al., 2018; FYADfpuGrYwJ, 2022; Pew, 2021).

This data reinforces the theory that disinformation has become part of a systematic and planned digital campaign strategy (Pariser, 2011; McIntyre, 2018; Nguyen, 2021). Thus, efforts to counter disinformation are not enough through fact checking alone, but must also address algorithmic dimensions and digital ethics.

Democratic Consequences and Policy Recommendations

The main consequence of post-truth politics is the delegitimization of democracy. When opinions replace facts, elections are no longer a rational mechanism, but a battleground for collective emotions (Yegen et al., 2022; Tomsa, 2020; Sawitri, 2021). Extreme polarization fuels distrust of institutions, including the KPU and the Supreme Court in Indonesia, as well as agencies such as the DOJ and FBI in the US. Key recommendations from this study include:

- 1) Digital literacy based on the national curriculum,
- 2) Transparency of digital platform algorithms (e.g., Facebook/Twitter public audits),
- 3) Ethical regulation of AI-based digital campaigns and microtargeting.

This step is important to ensure that digital technology does not become a tool of democratic destruction, but rather a space for healthy public deliberation (KrshDq9z0hYJ, 2022; Sagbakken, 2022; Astuti et al., 2024).

4. Conclusion

This research reveals that political disinformation in the context of the 2024 elections in Indonesia and the United States is conveyed through specific and contextual narratives. In Indonesia, disinformation exploits identity-based issues such as religion and ethnicity. At the same time, in the United States, the dominating narratives relate to ideology and anti-institutional conspiracies such as the "deep state" and voting system fraud. These patterns demonstrate that disinformation is not merely an informational distraction but a strategic instrument in political discourse battles that leverages the power of emotions and societal divisions. Furthermore, this study found that social media plays a crucial role in expanding the reach of disinformation and deepening public polarization. With the support of algorithms prioritizing viral content, post-truth narratives spread through digital networks controlled by partisan actors. These findings indicate that political campaign strategies have shifted towards the systematic and transnational digitalization of disinformation. Therefore, a policy response is needed that incorporates digital literacy, algorithmic transparency, and the strengthening of digital political campaign ethics to maintain the integrity of democracy and a healthy public sphere.

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