

**Social Media Blocking Policy In Democracy Country:
The Case of Social Media Blocking related to the rejection of the
Indonesia 2019 Presidential Election result**

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Abstract

The argument of this article is that the policy to blocking of social media is not always in contradiction with democracy. The increasing volume of hoaxes related to the rejection actions of the results of the Presidential Election on May 21 and 22 in front of the KPU and BAWASLU buildings, has the potential to disrupt the Presidential Election process, so the restrictive measures are important and urgent. Even though it is not popular in the democratic tradition, the courage to limit social media, it is difficult to resist, has benefited the sustainability of democracy. The Government's social restrictions policy is in line with efforts to strengthen democracy: (1) it is temporary, not permanent; (2) focus on certain social media in certain areas, (3) aims to reduce hoaxes; and (4) carried out by a democratic state that allows control by Parliament so that the policy on social media restrictions is not out of control.

Keywords: Social Media Blocking, Hoaxes, Post Truth, Democracy.

The result of the 2019 presidential election reaped the pros and cons. Those who contra expressed their aspirations in various ways, one of which held an action on 21 and 22 May in front of the KPU and BAWASLU buildings. Allegations of structured, systematic and massive fraud directed against the Election Organizer. Both supporters and opponents of the results of the Presidential Election have arguments, unfortunately, in the process of arguing that occurs in social media, there is almost no productive dialogue. Instead, the argument is monologue, accompanied by many coachman debates. Furthermore, the discourse war has the potential to disrupt the stability of the country (at least from the perspective of the Government) so that efforts to manage the debate in social media are urgent. One way to do this is through blocking on the use of Social Media.

This paper focuses on exploring the policy of limiting social media related to the pros and cons of the 2019 Presidential Election result. This topic is interesting because Indonesia is the largest democracy in the world (after India and The USA). Indonesia has a long experience in managing cultural, religious and ethnic diversity including the struggle of civil society in fighting for their rights, which is reflected in the 1998 Reformation which had toppled the authoritarian New Order regime but on May 21, a day after KPU announced the results of the Presidential Election, the non-popular policy has been taken by the Government through blocking Facebook, Instagram and

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WhatsApp, even more than 700 thousand accounts have been closed because it was considered to violate the law.³

Indonesia is not the only democratic country that has a policy of limiting social media, a number of countries also have similar policies ranging from mild to severe. The USA Department of State requires Visa applicants to attach social media accounts (including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Google+, LinkedIn, MySpace, Pinterest, Tumblr, Reddit, Vine, Flickr accounts including Weibo, Youku, QQ, Twoo, Douban, VK accounts and Ask.fm), email address and telephone number. The rule was proposed in March 2018 as a move by the Donald Trump administration to tighten checks on prospective immigrants and visitors.⁴ In Austria, the government prepares rules that require social media users to register their real names and addresses on registered sites before they can comment.⁵ Restrictions are also carried out by countries such as Turkey, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. Tighter restrictions are imposed by non-democratic countries such as North Korea, Vietnam, Russia and China. It is hard to deny that countries with tight control policies on social media are non-democratic countries or at least democracy countries with many records. Interestingly, Indonesia as 3rd biggest democracy has also implemented a similar policy.

Case of Social Media Blocking in Indonesia

Lying news or hoaxes⁶ is not a new problem, but as the widespread use of the internet and social media becomes an even greater challenge.⁷ The public is faced with the phenomenon of flooding of data, they can use any data and conclude as they wish to share in social media with the aim of influencing or simply being responded to by others. The increasing volume of hoaxes affects social relations. With a more massive scale formed a new pattern of relations commonly referred to as the Post Truth,⁸ namely "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief."⁹ In Post Truth

³ "Wiranto Ancam Take Down Medsos, Bukan Media Massa," <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20190507184920-20-392811/wiranto-ancam-take-down-medsos-bukan-media-massa>

⁴ Adi Fida Rahman, "Pemohon Visa AS Wajib Cantumkan Akun Media Sosial," 3 Juni 2019, <https://inet.detik.com/cyberlife/d-4574906/pemohon-visa-as-wajib-cantumkan-akun-media-sosial>

⁵ Jeko I. R., "Cuma di Negara Ini, Komentar di Media Sosial Harus Pakai Nama Asli," 23 Apr 2019, <https://www.liputan6.com/tekno/read/3947906/cuma-di-negara-ini-komentar-di-media-sosial-harus-pakai-nama-asli>

⁶ Oxford dictionary mendefinisikan hoax sebagai "A humorous or malicious deception." <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/hoax>

⁷ Norman VASU, et al. Fake news: National security in the post-truth era. RSIS, 2018. p: 3.

⁸ 'Post-truth' named 2016 word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries, Amy B Wang, 'Post-truth' named 2016 word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries, 16 Nov 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/11/16/post-truth-named-2016-word-of-the-year-by-oxford-dictionaries/?noredirect=on>

⁹ Oxford dictionary, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/post-truth>

objective truth even through scientific methods, is forced to submit to subjective truths. The situation becomes possible because of wordplay or verbal arguments, the ability to debate and convince others is more important than objective truth or in other words "what we take to be facts and truth is heavily dependent on the language games we take part in."¹⁰

Post Truth has important implications for the development of democracy. The political system adopted by the majority of countries in the world is believed to be the best in providing guarantees for the rights of citizens. However, the development of Post Truth which is marked by the neglect of objective truths and increasing attention to subjective truths allows hoaxes to flourish, so efforts to limit hoaxes in order to preserve democracy need to be done. Unfortunately, any attempt to limit the hoaxes that is technically usually done by limiting the use of social media is easily misunderstood as a limitation of the rights of citizens that is contrary to the spirit of democracy. The same opinion emerged when the Government through the Ministry of Communication and Information (Keminfo) announced it had blocked 2,184 social media accounts and websites related to the May 22 riots that occurred in Jakarta. The blocking was carried out before and during social access restrictions which lasted until 25 May related to the increase in hoaxes volume related to the results of the 2019 Presidential Election.¹¹

Why, how and how effectively can the social media restriction policy maintain the 2019 Presidential Election process? The length of the Presidential Election campaign period, more than 6 months (23 September 2018-13 April 2019) and the only two Candidate Pairs (PasanganCalon/ Paslon), became an important factor in the sharp competition among Paslon supporters. The competition has become more acute because of the widespread use of social media in Indonesia. In 2018 alone, at least 49% (130 million) citizens are active users of social media. 120 million people use mobile devices such as smartphones or tablets to access social media. The most popular social media in Indonesia are Facebook (41%), WhatsApp (40%), Instagram (38%) and Line (33%).¹² This setting allows a very massive hoaxes to occur and easy to do provocation. The high participation in political activities (with various expressions) caused by the massive information laden with hoaxes is precisely counterproductive to democracy. From the Government's perspective, the situation endangers the Presidential Election process (of course this situation can also be understood in a variety of ways by various political actors).

The announcement of the closing of the social media was officially delivered by Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs (Menteri Koordinator

¹⁰Knight, Eric, and HaridimosTsoukas. "When Fiction Trumps Truth: What 'post-truth'and 'alternative facts' mean for management studies." *Organization Studies* 40, no. 2 (2019): 183-197.

¹¹ SyamsulPramuji, "Kominfoblokir 2.184 akunmedsossterkaitkerusuhan 22 Mei," 29 Mei 2019, <https://beritagar.id/artikel/berita/kominfo-blokir-2184-akun-medsos-terkait-kerusuhan-22-mei>

¹² [Wahyunanda Kusuma Pertiwi](https://tekno.kompas.com/read/2018/03/01/10340027/riset-ungkap-pola-pemakaian-medsos-orang-indonesia), "RisetUngkapPolaPemakaianMedsos Orang Indonesia," <https://tekno.kompas.com/read/2018/03/01/10340027/riset-ungkap-pola-pemakaian-medsos-orang-indonesia>

Bidang Politik Hukum dan Keamanan/ MENKOPOLHUKAM) Wiranto regarding restrictions on social media features:

Pembatasan akses sosial media untuk tidak diaktifkan, dilakukan untuk mencegah hal-hal yang tidak diinginkan. Kami ingin masyarakat mendapatkan informasi yang akurat. Jadi berkorban 2-3 hari tidak bisa lihat gambar tidakapa-apa, ini semata-mata untuk keamanan nasional.

Kita ingin yang mengamankan negeri bukan hanya sebatas aparat keamanan, tetapi tanggungjawab masyarakat juga. Kalau masyarakat tidak percaya hoax dan berpikir rasional, tentu akan membantu mengamankan negeri ini.¹³

More technically the explanation was delivered by the Minister of Communication and Information Rudiantara, according to him the restriction was only carried out on pictures, photos, and videos. While SMS communication and voice calls are not blocked.¹⁴ The basis of the policy is Law Number 19, 2016 concerning Information and Electronic Transactions (ITE) whose substance includes limiting.

The government began to close the social media associated with the action of rejecting the results of the 2019 Presidential Election on May 22 and 23 for at least 4 days from 22 to 25 May, especially in Jakarta. Blocking is aimed at Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram for videos and photos. Videos and photos were chosen because of the ease with which social media users publish them. The capture of images and videos directly from the incident can be loaded with or without information that shows the truth of an event, so it is easy to cause misunderstanding. Government efforts to limit social media, of course, reap controversy. Sharp criticism was not only conveyed by supporters of Paslon, but by the wider community whose daily activities depended on social media. Economic losses are one of the reasons that the Government is bombarded with criticism. General Chairman of the Post-Mesmas DPP Community Organization, ToninTachtaSingarimbun, for example, said:

"Keputusan Pemerintah memblokir atau mengurangi fitur upload-download gambar dan video menggunakan WA, IG dan FB sejak tanggal 22 Mei 2019 telah merugikan masyarakat di Indonesia dan mengenai UU-nya memblokir apa ? Kan sama-sama pernah dengar e-corn atau e-con yang mana masyarakat secara online mengirimkan foto/video sebelum pemblokiran jadi apa salah masyarakat?"¹⁵

The government's unpopular policy has proven to be effective in securing the 2019 Presidential Election process to completion. If only these efforts were not made, then you can imagine how a variety of more massive hoaxes occurs and further effects that are increasingly difficult to control and even allow the creation of situations that potentially attract foreign interference, although it is certain that the policy to close the social media is not the only factor that has succeeded in the Presidential Election process.

¹³ Samuel Pablo, "WhatsApp Cs Dibatasi, IniPernyataanLengkap Pemerintah," 22 May 2019, <https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/tech/20190522152020-37-74313/whatsapp-cs-dibatasi-ini-pernyataan-lengkap-pemerintah>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ PernitaHestinUntari, "Akses Media SosialDibatasiSaatAksi 22 Mei, OrmasPaskaMesikaLayangkanGugatan," 24 Mei 2019, <https://techno.okezone.com/read/2019/05/24/207/2059834/akses-media-sosial-dibatasi-saat-aksi-22-mei-ormas-paska-mesika-layangkan-gugatan>

Characteristics of the Social Media Blocking Policy May 22-25

Government efforts to regulate reporting in social media should be suspected because freedom of information is one of the characteristics of a democratic country. The development of social media makes media information and communication increasingly diverse. Facebook, Tweeter, WhatsApp, Line, Wechat, BBM and so on in addition to Mass Media creates a new social space that allows more liquid, direct public discussion and interactive. The new public space created certainly plays a role in strengthening democracy. However, this new type of information and communication media has a unique character that is very different from the conventional mass media. Social Media allows everyone to be able to inform each event very easily, directly and interactively in contrast to the Mass Media which specifically has a definition as regulated by Law No. 40/1999 concerning the Press.

It is this convenience that makes important elements and quality of information (such as 5 W + 1 H, balanced, etc.) not priority. In fact, information can be arbitrarily created, engineered and regulated in such a way as to influence public opinion. The public sphere that was built by the social media in its development became a platform for debating, blaspheming with each other, spreading lies until provocations which tore apart social ties and even threatened the integrity of the State.

At this stage, efforts to control social media are a must. The reason is that instead of strengthening democracy, social media with a post-truth face threaten democracy that has been built so far. Nevertheless, efforts to control social media remain problematic because it is very easy to politicize. But the reluctance to reorganize the way the people with social media is precisely like turning on the "time bomb" button that will destroy the building of democracy. Controlling social media that has been tainted by the post-truth virus is the only rational choice that must be done carefully. In the case of the 2019 Presidential Election, the Government has actually been challenged to do the best possible and it seems that the results of the policy have been felt.

A number of characteristics that allow the social media restriction policy is safe for the ongoing process of Democracy in Indonesia, *first*, are temporary, not permanent, which only lasts at least 4 days (May 22-25) in an area that is considered vulnerable, namely the Capital City. Furthermore, the situation has begun to stabilize, the policy is stopped. Time and place restrictions are made on the basis of priority. Certainly, the post-action deadline is used to disseminate information related. So the selection of the limitation date is very appropriate. Failure to determine the time, for example before or even after the action certainly gives room to spread the hoaxes.

Second, focus on certain social media. In particular, the social media that were targeted by the restrictions were WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram because they were considered the most popular and only for video and photos because the 2 type of file was audiovisual so it was easy to provoke emotions. The use of social media is very familiar in Indonesia, so limiting social media can suppress the spread of mass hoaxes.

Third, it aims to reduce (if not stop) hoaxes news even though the limitation also affects other sectors, especially the economy. Impacts on other sectors are difficult to avoid because the use of social media is already very widespread and digital economic

activities are flourishing in Indonesia. Blocking of social media is estimated to harm online trading up to 681 billion.¹⁶ And the fourth is carried out by a democratic country. In a democratic country, control of power is carried out strictly. In Indonesia, one of the institutions that directly perform this control function is DPR. The existence of this institution allows the control function to be carried out effectively. So that fears of abuse of power by the Government can be suppressed. The social media restriction policy carried out by the Government is not excepted also controlled by the DPR. This point is important considering that in a democracy it is possible for control to take place so that the social media restrictions policy is not out of control.

This social control method is proven effective. One of the indicators is that the implementation of the Presidential Election has taken place optimally. Although it certainly cannot satisfy all parties, that is the risk of democracy as a government system which until now is believed to play the best role in protecting the rights of citizens. The achievement of democracy is very dynamic, proceeding with certain regulations made through agreement. Defects and deficiencies in the process are not failures, but dynamics and efforts to always complement the best achievements for which the measure is guaranteed citizens' rights.

Conclusion

Information restrictions, actually, go against democratic traditions, but the development of social media creates new public spaces that allow the opening of the Post Truth era. The era where objective truth is subject to subjective truth. In this situation, the volume of hoaxes increases and becomes a "poison" for democracy itself. If a certain level of poison becomes a cure for a disease, then effort to the limitation of hoaxes or more precisely blocking social media is actually an effort to "cure" democracy that is "sick" by the hoaxes virus. This paper argues that hoaxes restrictions are not only necessary but must be done to save democracy. If the hoaxes are left then it is not impossible that the democracy that has been fought for can die. No exception to the policy of social restrictions conducted by the Government to secure the 2019 Presidential Election process. The policy is actually part of an effort to save democracy. Although easily misunderstood, this unpopular policy must be implemented. The "body" of Indonesian democracy returned to "fit" after the sacrifice of "swallowing a bitter pill": a hoaxes restriction policy.

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