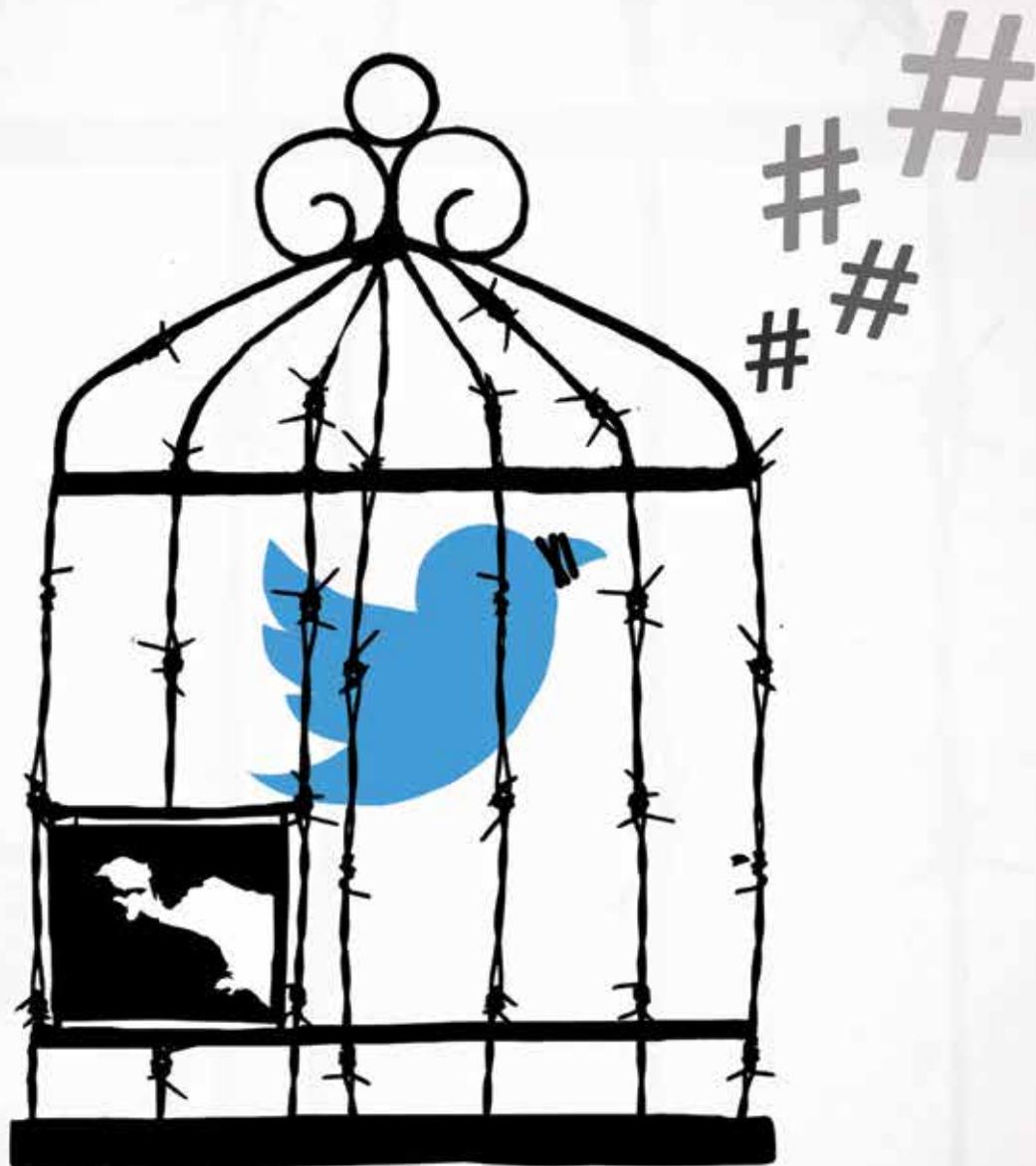
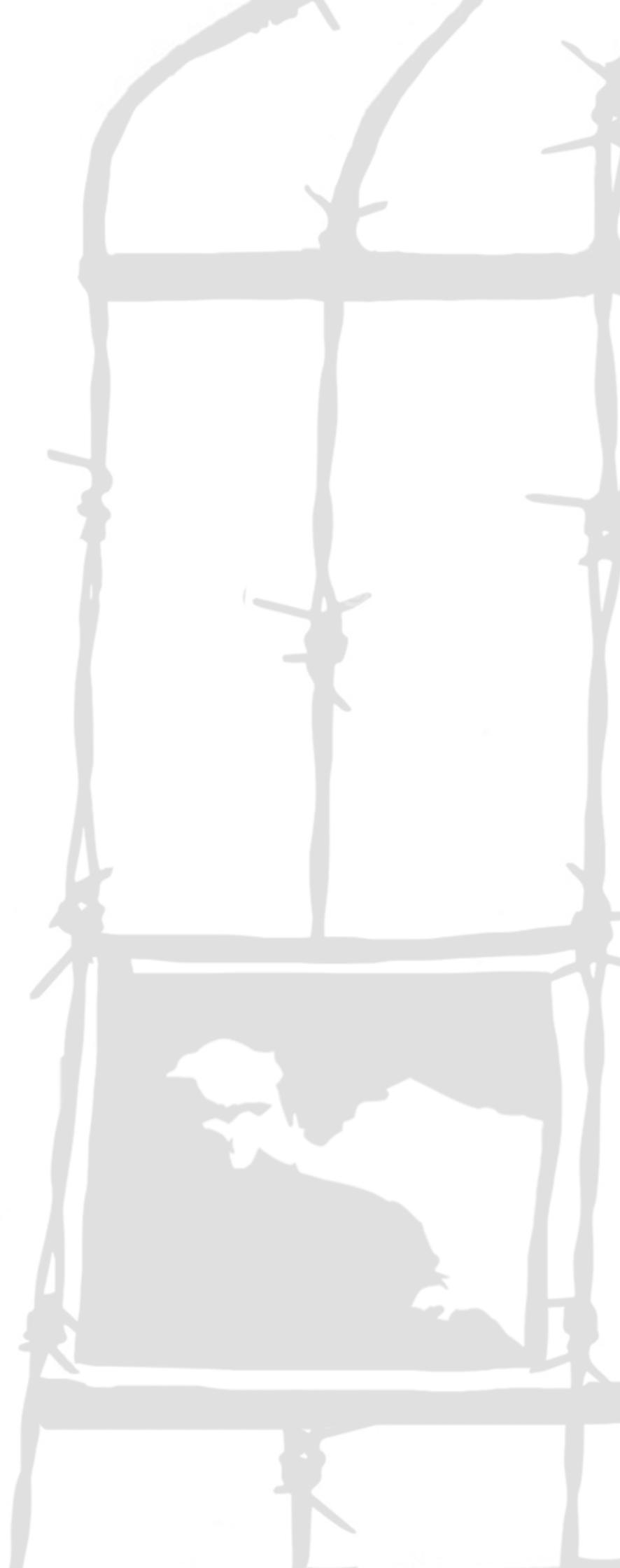


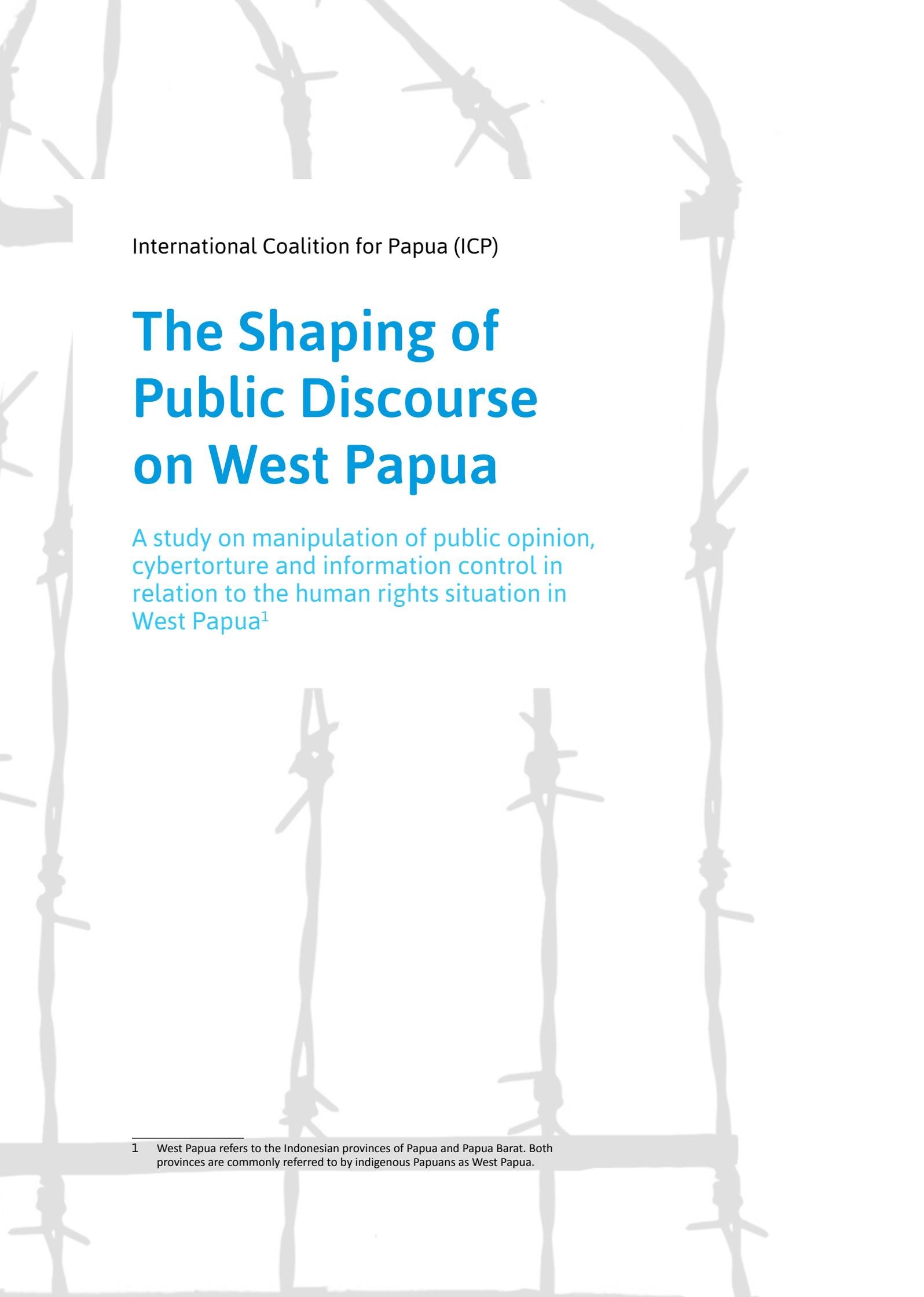
International Coalition for Papua (ICP)

# The Shaping of Public Discourse on West Papua

A study on manipulation of public opinion, cybertorture and information control in relation to the human rights situation in West Papua





The background of the page features a faint, light gray illustration of barbed wire. The wire is composed of several strands, with sharp, pointed barbs at regular intervals. The strands are arranged in a grid-like pattern, with some strands curving slightly. The overall effect is that of a prison or a restricted area, which is a visual metaphor for the themes of the report.

International Coalition for Papua (ICP)

# The Shaping of Public Discourse on West Papua

A study on manipulation of public opinion,  
cybertorture and information control in  
relation to the human rights situation in  
West Papua<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> West Papua refers to the Indonesian provinces of Papua and Papua Barat. Both provinces are commonly referred to by indigenous Papuans as West Papua.

# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5
Modern Propaganda and Other Forms of Manipulation .....	6
Manipulation of Public Discourse in Indonesia.....	8
Manipulation of Public Discourse on West Papua.....	10
Dissemination of Counter-Information.....	11
Smear Campaigns .....	18
Criminalisation.....	21
Limiting Access to the Internet.....	22
Censorship.....	24
Cyberattacks .....	25
Dissemination of Manipulated Statements and Advocacy Materials.....	26
Conclusion.....	28

# Introduction

The freedom of information and of the press, as an inherent part of the freedom of expression, is a foundation of modern democracies. The independence and diversity of the media landscape play important roles in any democracy. They constitute the foundation of public discourse and participation of civil society in democratic decision-making processes. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have become more important than ever as sources of information.

Governments worldwide have recognised the potential and the growing importance of social media in modern society. A research report presented by the University of Oxford<sup>1</sup> revealed that 70 countries used organised social media manipulation campaigns in 2019 to influence public opinion, not only within their territorial borders but also beyond. These campaigns suppress fundamental human rights, discredit political opponents, and silence dissenting views. Indonesia was listed among the countries using multiple forms of manipulation on various social media platforms.

A digital forensic study of cross-platform network analysis revealed two campaigns that use organised online media manipulation to influence public opinion in West Papua.<sup>2</sup> The research mostly covered campaigns targeting an international audience. However, other observers confirmed similar findings for social media accounts and websites which published pro-government information in Bahasa Indonesia.

The Indonesian government also used other forms of intervention to control the flow of information and content. These included the criminalisation of persons disseminating government-critical information, internet shutdowns and censoring or blocking websites publishing data on human rights violations or political independence. The Law on Electronic Information and Transactions is increasingly used to criminalise journalists, human rights defenders and activists, limiting freedom of expression in Indonesia.

1 Samantha Bradshaw, Philip Howard (2019): The Global Disinformation Order 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation, available at: <https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/93/2019/09/CyberTroop-Report19.pdf>

2 Benjamin Strick and Elise Thomas (2019): Investigating Information Operations in West Papua, A digital forensic case study of cross-platform network analysis, available at: [https://www.bellingcat.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Investigating\\_Information\\_Operations\\_in\\_West\\_Papua.pdf](https://www.bellingcat.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Investigating_Information_Operations_in_West_Papua.pdf)

# Modern Propaganda and Other Forms of Manipulation

The manipulation of the masses and the influencing of public opinion are not new ideas *per se*. However, the fact that classic tactics of disinformation found in authoritarian regimes are increasingly emerging in modern democracies as part of political campaigns is certainly a new finding.

The origin of some basic principles of manipulation may be found in online marketing strategies used by private companies to increase the presence of a company and promote its products on the global market. Other tactics may use the authority of the state. Manipulation of the online public sphere through social media and other internet platforms is often hidden. It is therefore not always possible to reveal the driving force behind such manipulations –a major reason why these new forms of information manipulation have become so attractive for states. Online media may be utilised to spread false information deliberately in order to sow doubts in people’s minds. Other forms of manipulation comprise smear campaigns to discredit opponents, hacking, leaking or inserting false information into online documents or images which appear to originate from a genuine source.<sup>3</sup>

According to the researchers Samantha Bradshaw and Philip Howard, the use of automated accounts controlled by “cyber troops’ or third parties is among the tactics which enjoy growing popularity among states. ‘Cyber troops’ are defined as government or political party actors tasked with manipulating public opinion online. [...] This involves building an inventory of the evolving strategies, tools and techniques of computational propaganda. This includes the use of ‘political bots’ to amplify hate speech or other forms of manipulated content, the illegal harvesting of data or micro-targeting, or deploying an army of ‘trolls’ to bully or harass political dissidents or journalists online”<sup>4</sup>. Cyber troops often cooperate with third-party actors offering their services in return for payment or because they share an ideological attitude with a government. Such third parties may comprise private companies, civil society organisations, internet subcultures, youth groups, hacker collectives, fringe movements or social media influencers.<sup>5</sup>

Cyber troops or third-party contractors use these bots to amplify alternative or fake news and false information to influence the online news agenda. Fake

- 3 Susan Morgan (08.05.2018): Fake news, disinformation, manipulation and online tactics to undermine democracy, p.39f, in *Journal of cyber Policy*, Volume 3:1, p. 39 – 43, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23738871.2018.1462395>
- 4 Samantha Bradshaw, Philip Howard (2019): *The Global Disinformation Order 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation*, p. 1, available at: <https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/93/2019/09/CyberTroop-Report19.pdf>
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 9

social media accounts are used to flood followers of particular hashtags with manipulated information, liking, following and sharing the posts of other bot accounts. The automated accounts of such manipulation networks can have many followers and “likes”, giving the user the impression that the information or its source is authentic. Scientists assume that the combination of bots and trolls is currently the most powerful strategy of computational propaganda.<sup>6</sup>

Likewise, cyber troops and third-party contractors create websites to promote alternative information or fake news. Such websites often carry names that resemble those of genuine news websites. These often use search engine optimisation (SEO) tactics to improve the Google ranking for specific keywords.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to the aforementioned approaches, the use of state authority for the manipulation of public opinion can be clearly traced to government actors. Such tactics comprise criminalisation of opponents and critics using vague legal provisions<sup>8</sup>, censorship<sup>9</sup> or limiting access to information by removing internet access, often under the pretext of national security.<sup>10</sup>

In response to the increasing use of new technologies by states to bypass international human rights norms, the United Nations recognised the need for an international legal framework to prevent the use of psychological torture through new technologies. On 20 March 2020, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment published a report that included an elaborated description of “Cybertorture”. Previously, internet torture had been understood primarily as a tool used to stifle freedom of expression on the internet and not as a violation of human rights that could be committed using various forms of information and communication technology (“cybertechnology”).<sup>11</sup>

6 Susan Morgan (08.05.2018): Fake news, disinformation, manipulation and online tactics to undermine democracy, p.40 f, in Journal of cyber Policy, Volume 3:1, p. 39 – 43, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23738871.2018.1462395>

7 Benjamin Strick and Elise Thomas (2019): Investigating Information Operations in West Papua, A digital forensic case study of cross-platform network analysis, p.18, available at: [https://www.bellingcat.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Investigating\\_Information\\_Operations\\_in\\_West\\_Papua.pdf](https://www.bellingcat.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Investigating_Information_Operations_in_West_Papua.pdf)

8 Amnesty International (04.09.2019): Indonesia: Drop charges against lawyer for Papuan political activists, available at <https://www.amnesty.org.au/indonesia-drop-charges-against-lawyer-for-papuan-political-activists/> & Amnesty International (02.10.2019): Open letter on the increasing use of Makar charges against Papuan activists to stifle freedom of expression, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA2111082019ENGLISH.pdf>

9 SAFEnet (2018): Jalan Terjal Mempejuangkan Hak-hak Digital, Laporan Tahunan SAFEnet 2018, p. 8f, available at: <https://safenet.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Laporan-Tahunan-SAFEnet-2018.pdf>

10 Ibid., p.12

11 UN Human Rights Council (28.2.2020): Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or Punishment, Report of the Special Rapporteur, A/HRC/43/49, p. 18f, available at: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/43/49>

# Manipulation of Public Discourse in Indonesia

The internet role in Indonesia as a source of information and a platform for public discourse has grown exponentially during the past ten years. In 2018, as many as 143.26 million Indonesians, 55.68% of the country's population<sup>12</sup>, were estimated to be accessing the internet, most of them using social media platforms. This has disturbed the power balance in Indonesia. Global companies such as Google, Twitter and Facebook pose new challenges to the Indonesian government. Although the government may request the suspension of accounts or content, the social media companies decide to what extent they comply with these requests. The rise of social media has pushed the boundaries of freedom of expression and freedom of information to a new level.<sup>13</sup>

On the one hand, the Indonesian government responded to this development by adjusting restrictive legal policies such as Law No. 11/2008 on Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE Law) in 2016.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, social media provided new opportunities for the government to promote and pursue state interests. In October 2019, the world's largest social media company 'Facebook Inc' removed a network of 69 Facebook accounts, 42 pages and 34 Instagram accounts in Indonesia. Facebook identified the network of automated accounts with hundreds of thousands of followers due to "coordinated inauthentic behaviour". According to the press release, the accounts had posted and shared content about West Papua, both in English and Indonesian. An investigation into the network of bot accounts revealed links to the Indonesian media firm InsightID.<sup>15</sup>

Facebook's findings reflect the results of Oxford University's report on global disinformation campaigns. The report found evidence of coordinated social media manipulation campaigns in 70 countries globally, including states with democratic governments like Indonesia. As many as 26 of the 70 governments of these nations used the campaigns to specifically suppress fundamental human rights, discredit political opponents, and silence dissenting opinions.

12 SAFEnet (2019): Jalan Terjal Mempejuangkan Hak-hak Digital, Laporan Tahunan SAFEnet 2018, p.5, available at: <https://safenet.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Laporan-Tahunan-SAFEnet-2018.pdf>

13 New Mandala (28.10.2019): The role of social media companies in shaping political discourse in Indonesia, available at: <https://www.newmandala.org/the-role-of-social-media/>

14 Undang-undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 19 Tahun 2016 tentang Peubahan Atas Undang-undang Nomor 11 Tahun 2008 Tentang Informasi dan Transaksi Elektronik, available at: <https://web.kominfo.go.id/sites/default/files/users/4761/UU%2019%20Tahun%202016.pdf>

15 Facebook (03.10.2019): Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior in UAE, Nigeria, Indonesia and Egypt, available at: [https://about.fb.com/news/2019/10/removing-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior-in-uae-nigeria-indonesia-and-egypt/?\\_twitter\\_impression=true](https://about.fb.com/news/2019/10/removing-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior-in-uae-nigeria-indonesia-and-egypt/?_twitter_impression=true)

Although the report did not list Indonesia among these 26 states<sup>16</sup>, other findings strongly indicate that the criteria above also apply to social media manipulation campaigns in Indonesia. However, there has been no proof of direct involvement by government agencies in such campaigns.

The Oxford University's report reveals that the social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp were used for manipulation campaigns in Indonesia.<sup>17</sup> These campaigns involved human actors and bots<sup>18</sup> and were organised either by private contractors or politicians and parties as part of political campaigns.<sup>19</sup> Media manipulation in Indonesia included spreading pro-government propaganda, attacking the opposition, mounting smear campaigns against critics, and driving division and polarisation.<sup>20</sup> This was achieved by creating disinformation or manipulating media, as well as by the amplification of content and online media.<sup>21</sup> Indonesian groups engaging in cyber manipulation were categorised as low-capacity groups, involving small teams which become active during elections or in response to particular events. Based on the applied tactics and their mode of operation, the researchers assessed that the invested resources totalled between 1M-50M Rupiah (between US\$71,000 and US\$3,551,000) through multiple contracts with private companies.<sup>22</sup>

Although online media manipulation cannot be traced to a particular actor, the control of the flow and diversity of information and the criminalisation of government critics are tactics commonly used by state authorities. Standard methods of restricting freedom of information in Indonesia are censorship and the deliberate blocking of the internet, commonly referred to as "throttling.

The Indonesian NGO SAFEnet published a report in 2019, according to which LGBTI community and Papuan activists were among the most affected by the blockage and censorship of information.<sup>23</sup> In 2018, the Indonesian government blocked 961,456 websites, most with pornographic, gambling, or fraud content. In January 2018, the Google Play store erased 73 apps at the request of the Indonesian government. SAFEnet observed that censorship in Indonesia significantly increased with the introduction of the Cyber Drone 9 system for filtering unwanted web content.<sup>24</sup>

16 Samantha Bradshaw, Philip Howard (2019): The Global Disinformation Order 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation, p. 2 ff, available at: <https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/93/2019/09/CyberTroop-Report19.pdf>

17 Ibid., p.6

18 Ibid., p. 12

19 Ibid., p. 10

20 Ibid., p. 14

21 Ibid., p. 16

22 Ibid., p.20

23 SAFEnet (2019): Jalan Terjal Mempejuangkan Hak-hak Digital, Laporan Tahunan SAFEnet 2018, p.5, available at: <https://safenet.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Laporan-Tahunan-SAFEnet-2018.pdf>

24 Ibid., p. 8

SAFEnet also noticed a significant rise in the use of the ITE Law, indicating a shrinking space for freedom of expression throughout 2018. Data by the Supreme Court counted 292 court rulings on the violation of the ITE Law in 2018, in comparison with only 140 of such rulings in 2017. Moreover, the Supreme Court counted 276 criminal cases in which defendants had allegedly violated the ITE Law in 2018. Forty-five per cent of them used Article 27, Paragraph 3 on defamation; and 22% of the cases used Article 28, Paragraph 2 on hate speech.<sup>25</sup> Forty-four per cent of the lawsuits were initiated by government officials using various articles of the ITE Law. The most targeted victims of criminalisation throughout 2018 were journalists and media outlets, making up 32% of the documented cases.<sup>26</sup> Other identified risk groups were activists and teachers or lecturers.<sup>27</sup>

## Manipulation of Public Discourse on West Papua

Public opinion and discourse on West Papua is manipulated in multiple ways. Standard methods use the internet, particularly the social media platforms Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, or other channels such as websites or blogging platforms. Current efforts of online manipulation vary from disseminating pro-government counter-information to the discreditation of human rights defenders and political activists through smear campaigns. Other strategies require direct involvement from government authorities to prevent or regulate the dissemination of critical content on West Papua. Such methods mainly consist of censorship of websites, criminalisation of human rights defenders, activists and journalists, the blocking of internet access in the interest of national security or the dissemination of manipulated statements. Legitimate Papuan online news outlets reported that their websites are frequently subjected to cyberattacks. However, it was not possible to relate these attacks to particular actors.

25 Ibid., p. 15

26 Ibid., p. 13

27 Tirto.ID (18.10.2018): Jerat UU ITE Banyak Dipakai oleh Pejabat Negara Baca selengkapnya di artikel 'Jerat UU ITE Banyak Dipakai oleh Pejabat Negara', available at: <https://tirto.id/jerat-uu-ite-banyak-dipakai-oleh-pejabat-negara-c7sk>

## Dissemination of Counter-Information

Numerous social media accounts promote the unitary state doctrine of the Indonesian government (NKRI)<sup>28</sup> and deny the involvement of the country's security forces in human rights violations in West Papua. They also deny the existence of aspirations for self-determination in West Papua. Their posts promote the benefits of government programmes in West Papua and criticise the alleged influence of foreign forces and media misrepresenting the situation in West Papua. Furthermore, these accounts condemn pro-independence activists and human rights defenders as foreign influencers driven by foreign powers with hidden agendas.<sup>29</sup>

Genuine campaigns on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube aim to inform a national and international audience of growing tensions and human rights violations in West Papua. Activists believe that posts on fake social media accounts are aimed not only at countering information on self-determination or human rights violations in West Papua, but also at provoking pro-Papuan activists' reactions to expose their political opinion on Facebook. This could be part of a government strategy to collect information on pro-Papuan users or critics of the government.

A large number of accounts do not appear to belong to private users genuinely. Many share posts in English to reach a foreign audience. Their posts are limited to West Papua-related issues and are shared daily. They often contain counter-information or alternative facts regarding incidents and developments which are discussed in the media. The accounts often carry the names of indigenous clans as surnames, and the profile pictures portray indigenous Papuans.

Research published by the investigative research platform Bellingcat (stylised as bellɿŋcat) identified a network of automated bot accounts on the social media platforms Twitter, Instagram and Facebook with fake followers and a significant number of "likes", some of which run paid advertisements estimated to reach US\$300,000. Facebook confirmed that they were primarily paid in Indonesian currency.<sup>30</sup> A network of automated social media accounts was posting, liking, retweeting and commenting on posts carrying particular

28 NKRI stands for Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia or the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia

29 Benjamin Strick and Elise Thomas (2019): Investigating Information Operations in West Papua, A digital forensic case study of cross-platform network analysis, p. 3, available at: [https://www.bellingcat.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Investigating\\_Information\\_Operations\\_in\\_West\\_Papua.pdf](https://www.bellingcat.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Investigating_Information_Operations_in_West_Papua.pdf)

30 Ibid., p.6f

hashtags.<sup>31</sup> The unauthentic accounts used fake profile pictures and did not interact with other social media users, posting, tweeting and retweeting information in automated patterns.<sup>32</sup>

The findings by Facebook and research projects confirm the existence of hundreds of fake accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, frequently posting information under hashtags such as #PapuaIndonesia, #PapuaNKRI or #WestPapuaNKRI targeting recipients with Indonesian pro-government attitudes. A further strategy used hashtags such as #WestpapuaGenocide and #FreeWestPapua to share pro-government content on West Papua among English-speaking social media users following these hashtags and flooding them with pro-Indonesian anti-independence content.<sup>33</sup>

Another tactic employed for such campaigns is typosquatting, in which accounts with deliberate misspellings in their names are created. The names of these accounts resemble those of established pro-independence accounts but were sharing pro-Indonesia content. Examples of typosquatting in the context of West Papua were mainly found on Twitter (see example below).<sup>34</sup>



Example of Typosquatting on Twitter: The established Twitter account @WestPapuaMedia (left image) promoting independent reporting on West Papua and the Twitter account @WestPapuaaMedia, both as of 6 October 2019 (Source: Benjamin Strick, Elise Thomas (2019): *Investigating Information Operations in West Papua, A digital forensic case study of cross-platform network analysis*, p. 14f).

“Facebook fan-pages” consistently sharing counter-information and alternative facts have mushroomed in recent years. The pages have numerous ‘likes’, creating the image that many people support their views. On Instagram, dubious accounts share short videos and pictures of landscapes and tourist destinations in West Papua. They use particular hashtags to flood Papua-interested followers with pro-government information and create an information counterbalance to critical news on West Papua (see table below).

31 Ibid., p.5

32 Ibid., p.6f & 12

33 Ibid., p.5

34 Ibid., p. 14



**Examples of Facebook pages sharing pro-government information on West Papua:**

'Save NKRI' (80,000 likes), 'NKRI Harga Mati' (15,000 likes), 'West Papua Indonesia' (156,000 likes), 'Suara Papua - Saya Indonesia' (52,000 likes), 'Seputar Papua' (1,611 likes)



**Examples of Twitter accounts sharing pro-government information on West Papua:**

@kapitennkri, @Alfredo\_Kaway, @Papua\_satu, @Papeda\_@wethePapuan, @Papuanews\_, @KitongKribo, @Papuanewsid, @West PapuaRus, @MelanesiaPapua, @PapuaID, @West PapuaZone1, @SaveWest PapuaId, @Sahabat\_Papua



**Examples of Instagram accounts sharing pro-government information on West Papua:**

PapuaIndonesia (18,700 followers), Papuanese\_ (3,200 followers), Papua\_basodara (1,500 followers), sako\_Papua (921 followers), Papua\_nkri (7,600 followers)

**Examples of hashtags used on Instagram for circulating pro-government information on West Papua:**

#PapuaIndonesia (43,200 posts), #PapualtuIndonesia (72,500 posts), #PapuaJugaIndonesia (1,600 posts), #PapuaNKRI (26,100 posts), and #West PapuaNKRI (6,600 posts).



**Examples of YouTube channels sharing pro-government information on West Papua:**

Papua Channel (95,000 subscribers):

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdY5WBAeDXm5zGxtlePDnLA>

Papua Channel TV (25,400 subscribers): [https://www.youtube.com/channel/Uck9bh\\_95iJ3jZDc2jk-P9g](https://www.youtube.com/channel/Uck9bh_95iJ3jZDc2jk-P9g)

*Examples of fake social media accounts, channels, fan pages, and the hashtags they use for sharing pro-government information on West Papua-related issues (Source: joint Suara Papua and ICP internet research)*

The Bellingcat research independently confirmed other findings of the Facebook investigations, both linking the Indonesian start-up company InsightID to the manipulation campaign. Although the research did not reveal who commissioned a campaign, the client must have unlimited financial resources and an interest in manipulating the political perception of West

Papua among the public.<sup>35</sup> According to the research, InsightID’s co-founder registered 14 domains on the same day using his personal email address.<sup>36</sup> All domain names indicated a clear association with West Papua. InsightID was allegedly behind smear campaigns against human rights lawyer Veronica Koman, Vanuatu’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ralph Regenvanu, and several foreign journalists.<sup>37</sup>

InsightID’s campaign used at least five websites to publish articles, infographics and videos about West Papua in English. All of these were promoted through the brands’ social media accounts on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, the content of which was amplified through automatised bot accounts. Open-source digital forensics revealed that the domains for these websites –namely [www.papuawest.com](http://www.papuawest.com), [www.inipapua.com](http://www.inipapua.com), [www.westpapuaindonesia.com](http://www.westpapuaindonesia.com), [www.infowestpapua.com](http://www.infowestpapua.com) and [www.freewestpapuacampaign.com](http://www.freewestpapuacampaign.com)– were registered between late July and early August 2018 under the fake name “Westy Pearly”. The researchers were later able to link the name with InsightID through the registrant’s telephone number which was associated with the personal Facebook page and LinkedIn account of an InsightID employee.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, InsightID promoted a project named “Papua Programme Development Initiative” in order to explore rapid socio-economic development and its challenges in West Papua.<sup>39</sup>

A smaller pro-government campaign was attributed to the Indonesian intellectual Muhamad Rosyid Jazuli.<sup>40</sup> However, Jazuli’s campaign was smaller and allegedly used the brands *Wawawa Journal* ([www.wawawajournal.com](http://www.wawawajournal.com)), *Tell the Truth NZ* ([www.tellthetruthnz.com](http://www.tellthetruthnz.com)) and *Noken Insight* ([www.nokeninsight.com](http://www.nokeninsight.com)), each of which has its own website, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube accounts. This campaign appears to be tailored towards audiences in New Zealand and Australia. It attempted to manipulate perception on West Papuan independence aspirations, on the one hand through the dissemination of false or slanted news, and on the other hand through smear campaigns against media outlets, activists and human rights defenders who had raised awareness of the human rights situation in West Papua at an international level.<sup>41</sup> Jazuli admitted that he and some of his friends had used their own financial resources to create the *Wawawa Journal* and *Tell the Truth NZ* websites and social media accounts to promote “positive reporting” on the situation in West Papua as an alternative source of information to “negative coverage” by foreign media.<sup>42</sup>

---

35 Ibid., p. 31

36 Ibid., p. 27

37 Ibid., p. 16

38 Ibid., p. 20f

39 Ibid., p. 24

40 Ibid., p. 39f

41 Ibid., p. 32ff

42 Ibid., p. 44f

During the past three years, many new websites and free blogger sites about West Papua have emerged. Similar as social media accounts that appear not to be genuine, these websites promote only pro-government values and policies (*see table below*).

The Bellingcat research revealed that the operators of the websites used search engine optimisation (SEO) tactics to improve the ranking of their websites for specific keywords used for Google search.<sup>43</sup> Such tactics include the use of bots carrying the website's domain as its username. The research concludes that website operators paid the owners of blogs to include the domain names of their websites in published articles, although the blog had very little or even no connection with West Papua. Moreover, articles with links and domain names were posted on the file-sharing websites Scribd and Issuu. Some articles appeared to be automatically generated– the web domain was embedded in a random string of words (*see image below*). The frequent references to a domain and links make the domain appear more significant or legitimate for the Google search algorithm and result in a higher ranking.<sup>44</sup>

**Examples of news websites sharing pro-government information in Bahasa Indonesia:**

[www.papuanews.id](http://www.papuanews.id)  
[www.kabarpapua.co](http://www.kabarpapua.co)  
[www.dharapospapua.com](http://www.dharapospapua.com)



**Examples of news websites sharing pro-government information in English:**

[www.freewestpapua-indonesia.com](http://www.freewestpapua-indonesia.com)  
[www.westpapuanow.com](http://www.westpapuanow.com)  
[www.nokeninsight.com](http://www.nokeninsight.com)  
[www.westpapuaupdate.com](http://www.westpapuaupdate.com) (not updated since January 2018)  
[www.onwestpapua.com](http://www.onwestpapua.com) (not updates since February 2018)

**Examples of websites promoting smear campaigns against human rights defenders:**

[www.stopfitnah.com](http://www.stopfitnah.com)  
[www.kitongorangpapuanews.com](http://www.kitongorangpapuanews.com)

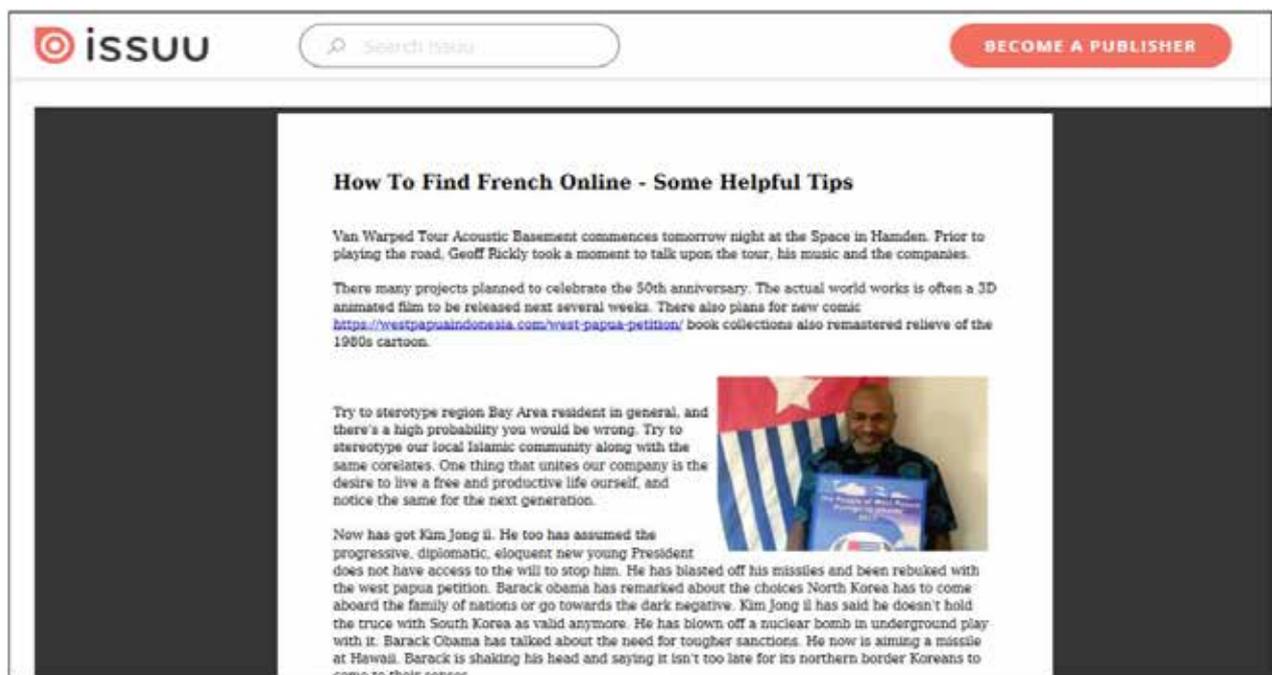
*Examples of websites sharing pro-government information on West Papua-related issues and engaging in smear campaigns against human rights defenders raising public awareness on human rights abuses in West Papua (Source: joint Suara Papua and ICP internet research)*

43 Ibid., p.18

44 Ibid., p. 19f

In most cases, it is not known who created these websites, who is responsible for their maintenance, and to what extent the Indonesian government is involved. However, some Papuan journalists claim that several websites providing information in English were initiated by Indonesian pro-government intellectuals one year before the results of the Bellingcat research were published. According to research conducted by Tirto.id and Jubi, approximately 18 dubious websites were sharing pro-government counter-information on West Papua in Indonesian language.<sup>45</sup>

Many websites have been deactivated or suspended, while others remain online, although they have not been recently updated with news items (see table above). The sudden removal of the websites may be related to a growing awareness of the manipulation campaign after Facebook deactivated hundreds of fake Indonesian accounts. Shortly afterwards, the publication of the Bellingcat research in October 2019 brought more insights into Indonesian private IT contractor InsightID in relation to the manipulation campaigns. Some internet domains used to disseminate counter-information are now offered for sale (see image below). The attempt to sell these domains for a high price on the free market is an indication that the website is owned by a private contractor such as a commercial IT company.



Example of an article posted on Issuu in order to improve the Google search ranking of [www.westpapuaindoensia.com](http://www.westpapuaindoensia.com). The article appeared to be automatically generated (Source: Benjamin Strick, Elise Thomas (2019): Investigating Information Operations in West Papua, A digital forensic case study of cross-platform network analysis, p. 19)

45 SAFEnet (2018): Jalan Terjal Mempejuangkan Hak-hak Digital, Laporan Tahunan SAFEnet 2018, p. 12, available at: <https://safenet.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Laporan-Tahunan-SAFEnet-2018.pdf>



Example of former pro-government news domains which were suspended and then offered for sale. The owner of the web domain [www.Papuaindonesia.com](http://www.Papuaindonesia.com) requests a price of US\$1,000,000 (million) for the domain

3DUniversum, a company based in Amsterdam, Netherlands, investigated 100 fake social accounts sampled for new research. The researchers concluded that 35 photographs appeared to be made through a machine. They also revealed that most of the manipulated pictures depicted Westerners, but 70% of their tweets were sent from servers in Papua and other parts of Indonesia.

Following the research, the University of Amsterdam succeeded in mapping a bot army on Twitter. As with Bellingcat's search, they found that most accounts were created in June 2020. The accounts tweeted almost 45,000 tweets, 12,000 of which were in Dutch. The tweets earned 35,000 shares and likes.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Jubi (20.11.2020): Kontra propaganda isu kemerdekaan West Papua gunakan pola baru, available at: <https://jubi.co.id/kontra-propaganda-isu-kemerdekaan-west-papua-gunakan-pola-baru/amp/>

## Smear Campaigns

During the past few years, dubious websites in Indonesia have repeatedly launched smear campaigns against civil society activists exposing human rights violations in West Papua to the public. The campaigns primarily targeted human rights defenders, accusing them of being separatists, disseminators of hoax news, or acting in the interests of “foreign powers”. The articles challenge the credibility of the exposed information, often by presenting counter-information or fake facts about the reported incident. Some dubious websites mention fake identities with names of indigenous Papuans as the authors of articles, but do not reveal the identities or addresses of the domain holder. In some cases, the article images were manipulated to trigger nationalist or religious sentiments against the human rights defenders among the readers.

Smear campaigns are often accompanied by doxing (or doxxing), which is the internet-based gathering and subsequent publication of personal data without the consent of the affected persons.<sup>47</sup> In the context of West Papua, doxing has been used to intimidate human rights defenders who participated in public events on West Papua.<sup>48</sup>

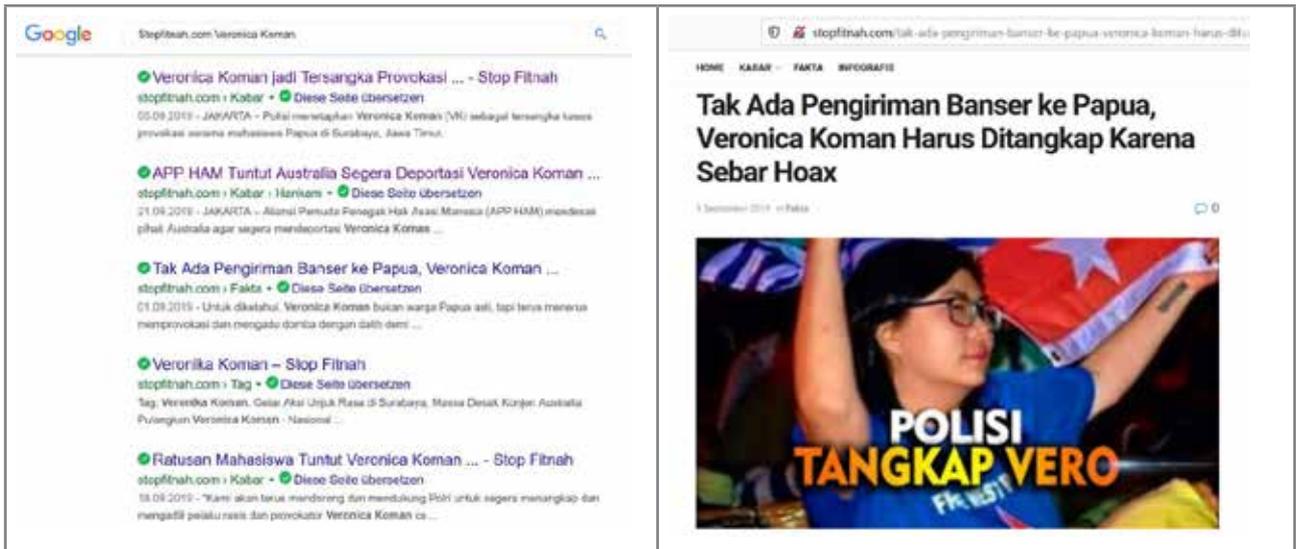
### Case Studies:

► The Indonesian website Stopfitnah.com launched a smear campaign against Ms Veronica Koman. The first articles were published in December 2017, after she and other human rights lawyers spoke out about a military operation in the regency of Nduga. Veronika Koman had shared information regarding the raid through her Twitter account and an interview with the Indonesian news magazine *TEMPO*. The website claimed that the information was hoax news and accused Veronica Koman of spreading unconfirmed information from unknown sources.<sup>49</sup> Stopfitnah.com launched a second smear campaign against Veronica Koman in September 2019, after police had charged her with “incitement” under provisions from the ITE Law, Article 160 of Indonesia’s Criminal Code, and the Elimination of Racial and Ethnic Discrimination Law. The campaign stirred emotions against Veronica Koman, alleging her of spreading hoax news and demanding her prosecution (*see images below*).

47 Kaspersky: What is Doxing – Definition and Explanation, available at: <https://www.kaspersky.com/resource-center/definitions/what-is-doxing>

48 CNN Indonesia (11.06.2020): Diwarnai Ancaman, Diskusi Papua Teknokra Unila Tetap Digelar, available at: <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20200611195649-20-512424/diwarnai-ancaman-diskusi-papua-teknokra-unila-tetap-digelar> & Suara.com (11.06.2020): Polisi Didesak Usut Pelaku Teror Jurnalis dan Aktivis Saat Diskusi Papua, available at: <https://www.suara.com/news/2020/06/11/224225/polisi-didesak-usut-pelaku-teror-jurnalis-dan-aktivis-saat-diskusi-papua>

49 International Coalition for Papua (29.12.2017): Human rights defenders face intimidation and discreditation after press release on a raid by security forces in Nduga, available at: <http://humanrightspapua.org/news/23-2017/288-human-rights-defenders-face-intimidation-and-discreditation-after-press-release-on-security-force-raids-in-nduga-regency>



Smear campaign against Veronica Koman after Indonesian police accused her of violating the ITE Law. The Google search with keywords “Stopfitnah.com veronica Koman” returned multiple articles - all published by Stopfitnah.com. Most articles discredit Veronica Koman, some appealing to the Australian government to extradite her to the Indonesian authorities (left image). One of the articles demanded that the police immediately arrest Veronica Koman for disseminating hoax news on West Papua (right image).

- ▶ The head of the Papuan Foundation for Justice and Human Integrity of the Papuan People (YKKMP), Theo Hese gem, was subjected to intimidation by security forces after the dubious website Kitorangpapuanews.com launched a smear campaign against him.



The edited image published by Kitorangpapuanews.com (left). One image of Theo Hese gem was taken during a press conference about a military operation in the regency of Nduga (centre). The image on the right shows Papuan human rights lawyer Yan Christian Warinussi during a meeting with President Joko Widodo (right). The head was replaced and the body later integrated into the smear campaign image (left).

The website published an article titled “Theo Hese gem spreads false news to cover up OPM brutality.” The article accused Theo Hese gem and the Catholic priest John Jongga of disseminating false information on the killing of civilians during the ongoing security operation in the regency of Nduga.

The image in the article was edited with an image editing program. It depicts two pictures of Theo Hese gem in front of a devil-like creature and the morning star flag. The body of one of the pictures was taken from an image showing the Papuan human rights lawyer, Yan Christian Warinussi, during a meeting with President Joko Widodo (see images above). The article refers to Theo Hese gem and Pastor John Jongga as “members of the separatist movement OPM, wearing a necktie”.

Shortly after the article was published, members of the 1702 Jayawijaya military command filed a complaint with the local police, alleging that Theo Hese gem had disseminated false information. A member of the criminal investigation police department summoned Theo Hese gem and questioned him about his report on human rights violations during the security operation in Nduga Regency.<sup>50</sup>

► In April 2021, unknown groups again distributed images of Theo Hese gem after members of the West Papua National Liberation Army (TPN PB) had killed two teachers, both non-Papuans, in the Beoga District of Puncak Regency on 8 and 9 April 2021<sup>51</sup>. The posts display images of Theo Hese gem, alleging that he directed his human rights advocacy only at Papuan victims and not against non-Papuan victims. Moreover, one image claimed that Theo Hese gem supported the government’s decision to designate the TPN PB as a terrorist organisation (see images below).



Edited images of Theo Hese gem disseminated on social media as part of a smear campaign against the human rights defender. The image on the left states: “I support the claim that the TPNPB/OPM is a terrorist organisation.” The photos in the centre and on the right imply that Theo Hese gem directed his human rights advocacy only at Papuan victims.

50 International Coalition for Papua (18.03.2019): Dubious websites allege human rights defenders disseminate false information, available at: <http://humanrightspapua.org/news/31-2019/415-dubious-website-alleges-human-rights-of-disseminating-false-information>

51 Jubi (9.4.2021): Guru di Beoga, Puncak ditembak karena kerap dijumpai membawa pistol, available at: <https://jubi.co.id/guru-di-beoga-puncak-ditembak-karena-kerap-dijumpai-membawa-pistol/amp/>

## Criminalisation

The criminalisation of political activists has been a common strategy to weaken political movements and limit fundamental rights in West Papua. Emergency Law No 12/1951 and Articles 106 or 110 of the Indonesian Penal Code on treasonous acts have been commonly used by the Papuan police and public prosecutors against political activists. However, since the exacerbation of the West Papua conflict in late August 2019, government authorities have used the momentum to criminalise journalists and human rights defenders under the pretext of violating the ITE Law.

While the use of the ITE Law for the restriction of freedom of expression and opinion is not a new pattern of criminalisation in West Papua, it is a matter of concern that the police have pushed the boundaries of prosecution from a local to a national level. They targeted persons living outside of West Papua, whom they accused of being responsible for sudden outbreaks of violence in Papuan cities. The unrest occurred in response to assaults against Papuan students in multiple Javanese cities in mid-August 2019.

### Case Studies:

- ▶ The police pressed charges against Indonesian human rights defender and lawyer Veronica Koman for alleged violation of Article 160 of the Indonesian Criminal Code (KUHP) and on incitement, violation of the Electronic Information and Transaction (ITE Law). They also charged her with contravening the Law on Elimination of Racial and Ethnic Discrimination for tweeting about a violent attack on a Papuan student dormitory on 17 August 2019. Veronica Koman denies any wrongdoing and accused the police of power abuse. She has faced harassment, intimidation and threats, including death and rape threats, for exposing allegations of human rights violations in West Papua and was forced to leave Indonesia to avoid prosecution by the authorities.<sup>52</sup>
- ▶ Police officers arrested the documentary filmmaker and executive board member of the National Independent Journalist Association (AJI), Dandhi Dwi Laksono, in the Javanese city of Bekasi. Laksono had posted comments and pictures of students who were allegedly shot dead during outbreaks of violence in Jayapura and Wamena. On 26 September 2019, police officers forcefully entered his house, and brought him to the Police Headquarters in Jakarta where he was taken into custody. He was charged under Articles 28

<sup>52</sup> Amnesty International (05.09.2019): Drop charges against lawyer for Papuan political activists, available at: <https://www.amnesty.id/indonesia-drop-charges-against-lawyer-for-papuan-political-activists/>

and 45 of the Indonesian Electronic Information and Transaction Law. The police accused Laksono of spreading hate speech. AJI urged the Indonesian police to drop all charges and immediately release him.<sup>53</sup>

► Police officers arrested Ferry Pakage and a friend named Gerius Wenda in the town of Sentani, Papua Province, on 23 February 2021. Ferry was charged under Article 28(2) on hate speech (SARA) of the Electronic Information and Transaction Act for posting a video showing a group of Papuan university students demanding to burn an Indonesian flag. The criminal investigators submitted the case to the public prosecutor's office in Jayapura on 23 April 2021. The police alleged that he had instigated Cenderawasih University students to protest against the prolongation of the special autonomy status for the provinces of Papua and Papua Barat.<sup>54</sup>

## Limiting Access to the Internet

West Papua continues to be among the regions with the lowest internet coverage in Indonesia. Over and above that, access to the internet is frequently restricted in response to violent incidents or if senior government officials visit West Papua. The Indonesian NGO SAFEnet observed that low net coverage and limited internet speed are major obstacles to distributing information through social media. Internet of sufficient speed can only be found in the large Papuan cities along the coastline such as Jayapura, Timika, Merauke, Biak and Nabire, whereas smaller towns like Agats struggle with slow connections below 1 Mb per second.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, SAFEnet confirmed that access to the internet is often completely blocked, particularly during Indonesian President Joko Widodo's visits. In 2018, internet access was blocked three times during such visits. In 2019, the government blocked the internet for weeks after outbreaks of violence accompanied anti-racism protests across West Papua.

### Case Studies:

► On 19 August 2019, the Indonesian Ministry of Communication and Information Technology blocked the internet in the provinces of Papua and

53 Jakarta Post (27.09.2019): Filmmaker Dandhy Laksono named "hate speech" suspect for tweeting about clashes in Papua, available at: <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2019/09/27/filmmaker-dandhy-laksono-named-hate-speech-suspect-for-tweeting-about-clashes-in-papua.html>

54 JUBI (15.4.2021): BAP tersangka ajak bakar merah putih dilimpahkan ke Kejari Jayapura, available at: <https://jubi.co.id/papua-bap-tersembunyi-ajak-bakar-merah-putih-dilimpahkan/amp/>

55 SAFEnet (2019): Jalan Terjal Mempejuangkan Hak-hak Digital, Laporan Tahunan SAFEnet 2018, p. 11, available at: <https://safenet.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Laporan-Tahunan-SAFEnet-2018.pdf>

Papua Barat after major anti-racism demonstrations and riots in multiple Papuan cities. The Indonesian NGO SAFEnet reported on 9 September 2019 that the government maintained the blocking in six areas of West Papua,<sup>56</sup> arguing that the measure would prevent the spreading of false information and calm ongoing tensions. The head of the Papuan branch of Indonesian telecommunication provider PT Telkom Indonesia, Mr Charles Aronggear, confirmed that the internet restrictions were imposed by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology.<sup>57</sup>

► Throughout 2020, SAFEnet received four reports of alleged internet slowdowns, also known as “throttling”, in West Papua. According to SAFEnet Director Damar Juniarto, in July 2020, internet and cell phone signals were switched off as the conflict situation in Nduga and Maybrat intensified. On 15 August 2020, the internet speed was reportedly reduced ahead of the first anniversary of the 2019 anti-racism protests.<sup>58</sup>

► A further breakdown of the internet in Jayapura was reported between 30 April and early June 2021. The breakdown occurred only five days after members of the West Papua National Liberation Army (TPN PB) killed a Papuan intelligence chief in Puncak Regency on 25 April 2021. Thereupon, Indonesian security forces launched an operation against the TPN PB on 27 April. Media observers and human rights activists suspected that the government deliberately shut down the internet to impede the flow of information in the central highlands. Indonesian Telecommunication company Telkom announced that a broken submarine cable was the reason for the internet breakdown.<sup>59</sup> According to SAFEnet, the breakdown was preceded by a series of digital attacks against multiple activists and journalists in Jayapura. The Papuan news outlet Jubi reported doxing attacks against them. Simultaneously, other observers independently confirmed the dissemination of mysterious SMS in support of the special autonomy and attempts to enter group chats on the messaging application Telegram.<sup>60</sup>

56 CNN Indonesia (09.09.2019): SAFEnet Catat 11 Wilayah di Papua Masih ‘Digelapkan’ Kominfo, available at: <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/teknologi/20190909113840-213-428693/safenet-catat-11-wilayah-di-papua-masih-digelapkan-kominfo>

57 JUBI (26.08.2019): Sambungan internet di Papua dibatasi, konsumen ingin Telkom Indonesia beri ganti rugi, available at: <https://www.jubi.co.id/sambungan-internet-di-papua-dibatasi-konsumen-ingin-telkom-indonesia-beri-ganti-rugi/>

58 JUBI (8.5.2021): SAFEnet: Ada konteks politik pada putusnya jaringan internet Jayapura, available at: <https://jubi.co.id/safenet-ada-konteks-politik-pada-putusnya-jaringan-internet-jayapura-papua/amp/>

59 JUBI (25.5.2021): Jayapura masih darurat internet, available at: <https://jubi.co.id/papua-jayapura-masih-darurat-internet/>

60 JUBI (8.5.2021): SAFEnet: Ada konteks politik pada putusnya jaringan internet Jayapura, available at: <https://jubi.co.id/safenet-ada-konteks-politik-pada-putusnya-jaringan-internet-jayapura-papua/amp/> JUBI

# Censorship

Censorship has been a common strategy employed by the Indonesian government to ban dangerous, immoral, and unethical content from the internet. Government agencies also censored political content contrary to government policies by blocking Papuan political websites and news outlets. The websites were considered too critical or promoted content in support of political independence. The censorship did not only concern local websites but also global social media platforms. The government used its authority, requesting the platforms to block access to critical content on West Papua from Indonesia.

## Case Studies:

► The Indonesian government attempted to censor several local news outlets publishing articles on human rights violations in West Papua. On 4 November 2016, the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology blocked the website of the Papuan news outlet Suara Papua for almost two months without providing an explanation or reason for the restriction. The censorship was lifted after the government agency failed to prove any violation of the journalist's code of ethics or publication of false news against ethnic, racial or groups or individuals.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the government blocked the Papuan news websites Infopapua.org, Tabloid-wani.com, Papuapost.com, Freepapua.com and Ampnews.org without providing details of the legal grounds for the censorship.<sup>62</sup>

► On 28 August 2019, YouTube blocked a satirical video about West Papua<sup>63</sup> from being viewed in Indonesia due to a "legal complaint from the government". The video entitled "Visit West Papua" satirises the Australian government's policies on West Papua. It portrays the Indonesian government as colonisers and the Australian government standing by for its own profit. The video, created by the Australian company The Juice Media, is one of its Honest Government Ad series and was first uploaded on 21 November 2018. Moreover, on 28 August 2019, Juice Media tweeted that it had received a message from YouTube stating that the video had been blocked in Indonesia following a legal complaint from the government. Although the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology did not confirm whether it had requested the blocking, National Police spokesperson, Dedi Prasetyo, stated

61 Suara Papua (31.01.2018): Pemerintah seenaknya blokir website dan portal berita, available at: <https://suarapapua.com/2017/01/31/pemerintah-seenaknya-blokir-website-dan-portal-berita/>

62 Suara Papua (18.04.2017): available at: <https://suarapapua.com/2017/04/18/blokir-lima-situs-di-papua-indonesia-dinilai-bungkam-ekspresi-maya-rakyat-papua/>

63 Juice Media Video with the title "On West Papua, Honest Government Ad | Visit West Papua!", available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjU8R8oj328&t=17s>

in an interview with the Jakarta Post that a National Cyber and Encryption Agency (BSSN) and a Ministry's team had blocked more than 1,750 accounts posting "provocative content" about West Papua between 14 and 27 August 2019.<sup>64</sup>

## Cyberattacks

Various Papuan online news outlets have been subjected to hacker attacks after they published critical articles on human rights violations in West Papua. According to the chairman and chief editor of the online platform Suara Papua, Mr Arnold Belau, their website was repeatedly attacked by hackers in 2017. It could not be accessed for three months as a result of cyberattacks.<sup>65</sup> Similar attacks were reported by one of the largest Papua online news outlets, Jubi, which documented up to 24 hacker attacks annually on their website.<sup>66</sup>

Cyberattacks did not only target local media outlets in West Papua, but also websites publishing information about the human rights situation in West Papua for an international audience. The EU-based web host "GreenNet", which hosts the website of the Papuan Behind Bars (PBB) campaign, was subjected to cyberattacks on 22 and 23 November 2019 to prevent access to a new PBB report.<sup>67</sup> The attacks were categorised as Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) for hire because they lasted precisely one hour.<sup>68</sup> A DDoS aims to overwhelm the servers with millions of requests until they exceed capacity and become unavailable.

### Case Studies:

► On 5 June 2020, human rights defenders experienced intrusion and harassment during a public video conference about human rights in West Papua and the forthcoming review of Indonesia by the UN. The meeting was

64 Jakarta Post (29.08.2019): Govt gets YouTube to block satirical West Papua advertisement, available at: <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2019/08/29/govt-gets-youtube-to-block-satirical-west-papua-advertisement.html>

65 Suara Papua (31.01.2018): Pemerintah seenaknya blokir website dan portal berita, available at: <https://suarapapua.com/2017/01/31/pemerintah-seenaknya-blokir-website-dan-portal-berita/>

66 SAFEnet (2019): Jalan Terjal Mempejuangkan Hak-hak Digital, Laporan Tahunan SAFEnet 2018, p. 12, available at: <https://safenet.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Laporan-Tahunan-SAFEnet-2018.pdf>

67 Papuans Behind Bars (20.11.2019): New political prisoners, treason charges and lack of judicial transparency in political prisoner cases, available at: [https://www.papuansbehindbars.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/PBB-Jan-2018-Oct-2019-Nov2019.EN\\_web.pdf](https://www.papuansbehindbars.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/PBB-Jan-2018-Oct-2019-Nov2019.EN_web.pdf)

68 GreenNet (5.12.2019): A call to action to defy Internet shutdowns and suppression of political opinion online

interrupted by “zoom bombing”<sup>69</sup> spam calls to speakers Usman Hamid from Amnesty International Indonesia, Papuan lawyer Yulianan Yabansabra and Tigor G. Hutapea from Pusaka.<sup>70</sup>

► Three activists from the Teknokra Student Press Activities Unit (UKPM) at the University of Lampung (Unila) in South Sumatra and the Journalists Union for Diversity (Sejuk) were intimidated before holding an online discussion about racial discrimination against Papuans on 11 June 2020. The threats reportedly began on 10 June when they received intimidating telephone calls from several unknown numbers. The attackers also hacked one of their media accounts. They received threatening messages depicting screen captures of their ID cards<sup>71</sup> together with voicemail threats.<sup>72</sup>

## Dissemination of Manipulated Statements and Advocacy Materials

Government actors have used manipulated statements and advocacy materials to promote government-driven agendas and state doctrines on social media. In the context of West Papua, such manipulation campaigns have been used to make viewers believe that people in West Papua support state doctrines and government programmes such as the unitary state ideology (NKRI) or the West Papua Special Autonomy. The materials create a counterbalance to government-critical information on social media. Case narratives imply that the state actors often target students. They are lured into attending meetings under varying pretexts without knowing the actual purpose of the event. Later, the students are pressured to sign written statements or make video statements disseminated as part of a counter-information campaign across social media platforms. The police also use such methods.

69 A type of cyberattack in which unknown users log into Zoom sessions to interrupt meetings

70 Jubi (10.06.2020): Dipukul orang tak dikenal, pengacara tapol Papua melapor ke polisi, available at: <https://jubi.co.id/dipukul-orang-tak-dikenal-pengacara-tapol-papua-melapor-ke-polisi/>

71 This method is known as doxing, namely efforts to find and disseminate an individual’s private information in the internet with the aim of attacking and weakening a person or online persecution. Doxing is one of the threats against the free press.

72 CNN Indonesia (11.06.2020): Diwarnai Ancaman, Diskusi Papua Teknokra Unila Tetap Digelar, available at: <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20200611195649-20-512424/diwarnai-ancaman-diskusi-papua-teknokra-unila-tetap-digelar> & Suara.com (11.06.2020): Polisi Didesak Usut Pelaku Teror Jurnalis dan Aktivis Saat Diskusi Papua, available at: <https://www.suara.com/news/2020/06/11/224225/polisi-didesak-usut-pelaku-teror-jurnalis-dan-aktivis-saat-diskusi-papua>

### Case Studies:

► On 25 June 2020, the Public Relations Department of the Nusa Tenggara Barat Regional Police (Polda NTB) published a video on Instagram to promote the Indonesian unitary state doctrine and counter media information supporting political self-determination for West Papua. The video shows a boy introducing himself as Bertus from Wamena who studies in the city of Mataram, Lombok, Nusa Tenggara Barat province. In the video, Bertus encourages all Papuans to love the unitary state of Indonesia (Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia, NKRI). Later, the boy published a second video apologising for the content of the Polda NTB video. He clarifies that his real name is Rian Faot from the city of Kupang, Nusa Tenggara Timur Province. He stated that Polda NTB members pressured him to make the video statement under a false identity.<sup>73</sup>

► A similar case occurred in Jakarta on 6 November 2020. Papuan students were invited to attend a consultation meeting at the Borobudur Hotel. According to the invitation letter, the consultation aimed to brief and coach Papuan students about new scholarship programmes. The students realised that the meeting was called “Papuan students support the continuation of Special Autonomy funding”. On 14 November 2020, unknown actors uploaded, on YouTube, a video<sup>74</sup> on behalf of the student organisation West Papuan Student Solidarity in Jakarta. The video shows two Papuan students talking about the benefits of special autonomy for the Papuan people. The chairperson of the solidarity group later clarified that the solidarity group rejects the continuation of special autonomy. He explained that pro-government figures had convinced the students to organise the meeting and a subsequent demonstration supporting Papuan special autonomy.<sup>75</sup>

► On 11 February 2021, two military members visited the home of Mr Hans Mote in the Hinekombe Village, Jayapura Regency, and suggested that he should participate in a video for the promotion of Papuan special autonomy. The purpose of the video was to depict indigenous Papuans as supporting the government’s plan to establish a third province in West Papua. Eventually, Hans Mote agreed to participate because he feared negative consequences if he refused to do so. An image shows a military officer holding a paper with the text that Hans Mote was supposed to read. At the same time, his comrade recorded the message on video (see image below).<sup>76</sup> The video was

73 PABI -Taawroli (25.06.2020): Klarifikasi, Polda NTB Memalsukan Nama dan Asal, Mengajak Masyarakat Papua Cinta NKRI, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6Mgj10g8Jo>

74 Pro NKRI (14.11.2020): Solidaritas Mahasiswa Papua Barat Di Jakarta Dukung Otsus Jilid II, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPOEtXWDqxo>

75 Suara Papua (06.12.2020): Klarifikasi Video Deklarasi Mahasiswa Papua di Jakarta Dukung Otsus Jilid II, available at: <https://suarapapua.com/2020/12/06/klarifikasi-video-deklarasi-mahasiswa-papua-di-jakarta-dukung-otsus-jilid-ii/>

76 Video available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUiTjirW34c>

part of an social media campaign to create the false impression that most indigenous Papuans support the special autonomy and the formation of new autonomous regions. The military appears to be directly involved in the implementation of the campaign.<sup>77</sup>



## Conclusion

Manipulation of public opinion on the conflict situation in West Papua is conducted through various strategies, methods and actors. According to one of the most comprehensive and recent reports on global social media manipulation, social media manipulation in Indonesia was used only by politicians or political parties and private contractors. Region-specific research on social media manipulation regarding West Papua revealed that the range of methods, strategies and actors in Indonesia was more comprehensive than that included in the Oxford University's report. Papuan online news outlets confirmed that their websites were frequently subjected to cyberattacks and censorship. In 2017, the Indonesian Ministry of Communication and Information Technology blocked several Papuan news websites without providing details of the legal grounds for the censorship. Some social media campaigns on West Papua were attributed to individual influencers such as the Indonesian intellectual Muhamad Rosyid Jazuli.

<sup>77</sup> Suara Papua (19.2.2021): Memalukan! TNI Paksa Pria Ini Bikin Pernyataan Dukung Pemekaran Provinsi di Papua, available at: <https://www.humanrightspapua.org/news/33-2021/748-government-plans-to-establish-papua-tengah-province-military-members-create-manipulated-video-to-promote-administrative-partition>

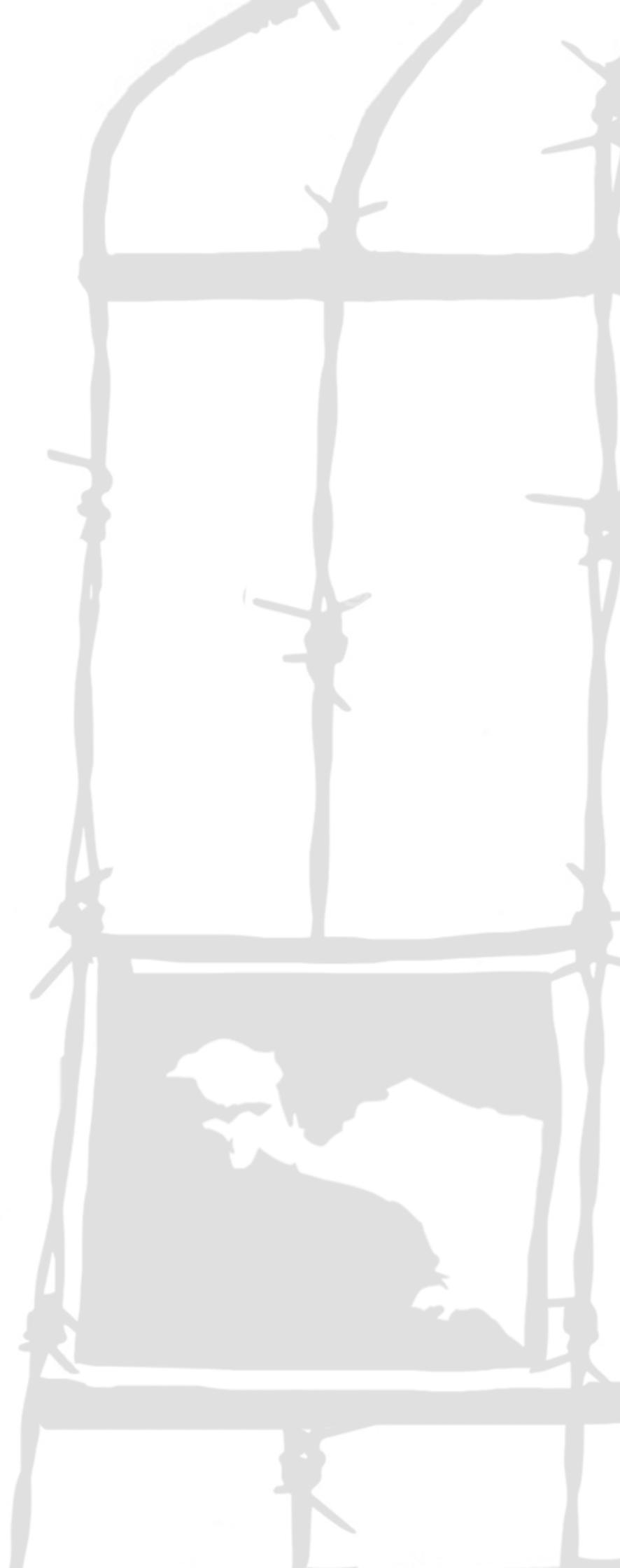
According to the report by Oxford University, manipulation strategies in Indonesia comprised (1) dissemination of pro-government propaganda, (2) attacking the opposition or mounting smear campaigns against critics as well as driving division, and (3) polarisation, but not the suppression of participation through personal attacks or harassment. The latest findings on media manipulation in response to the exacerbation of the conflict in West Papua and the subsequent crackdown on human rights defenders complement these results. Indonesian government authorities used vague legal provisions to suppress journalists and human rights defenders who had shared critical content on West Papua through their social media accounts. Smear campaigns against human rights defenders were reportedly accompanied by acts of intimidation, harassment, and death threats.

The dissemination of patriotic and nationalist content, combined with false and alternative facts to counter news on human rights violations and the political conflict in West Papua, is polarising civil society in Indonesia. This polarisation carries high risks concerning current horizontal tensions on the issue of West Papua. The division has also become visible in ethnic horizontal violence and racist assaults inside and outside of West Papua. Multiple racist assaults against Papuan students in various Javanese cities in mid-August 2019 caused widespread protests against racism and for self-determination across West Papua. The demonstrations were followed by a series of attacks against indigenous Papuans in the cities of Jayapura and Fak-Fak in late August.<sup>78</sup> The ethnic tensions reached their peak in the highland town of Wamena on 23 September 2019.<sup>79</sup> According to data published by the police, 33 people were killed (25 non-Papuans and 8 Papuans) and 82 others injured (38 non-Papuans and 44 Papuans) during the riot.<sup>80</sup>

78 International Coalition for Papua (15.10.2019): West Papua conflict exacerbates after racist assault against Papuan students – An analysis, available at: <http://humanrightspapua.org/news/31-2019/498-west-papua-conflict-exacerbates-after-racist-assaults-against-papuan-students-an-analysis>

79 Tirto ID (24.10.2019): Video Rusuh Wamena: Sedikitnya 11 Orang Papua Diduga Tewas Ditembak, available at: <https://tirto.id/video-rusuh-wamena-sedikitnya-11-orang-papua-diduga-tewas-ditembak-ekhb>

80 International Coalition for Papua (27.10.2019): Update riot in Wamena – Chronology of events and consequences of the riot, available at: <http://humanrightspapua.org/news/31-2019/502-update-riot-in-wamena-chronology-of-events-and-consequences-of-the-riot>





## **THE SHAPING OF PUBLIC DISCOURSE ON WEST PAPUA**

**A study on manipulation of public opinion, cybertorture and information control in relation to the human rights situation in West Papua**

International Coalition for Papua (ICP)  
Rudolfstr. 137, 42285 Wuppertal, Germany  
[www.humanrightspapua.org](http://www.humanrightspapua.org)

© December 2021

Layout & illustration @akalbudinetwork