Democracy Crisis in South-East Asia:
Media Control, Censorship, and Disinformation during the 2019 Presidential and General Elections in Indonesia, Thailand and 2019 Local Election in the Philippines

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Abstract

South-East Asia is suffering a rapid deterioration of the free press and Freedom of expression. According to the last report of Freedom in the World 2021, in the last few years, almost all the South-East Asian countries have experienced a reduction in Freedom of expression, and in certain cases, their rights have been restricted. What kind of effects do the media have on public opinion? How can disinformation, censorship, and media control manipulate public opinion? Is social media promoting the anti-democracy establishment? Does social media reduce the democratic quality of a country by limiting its expression through control? This paper is based on desk-based research, where literature on political history and the political history of using media has been reviewed and analyzed—with a comparative analysis, focusing on the data available on the three countries of interest: Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, taking a comparative study the last election in 2019 in those countries. As a method, this study conducts a critical literature review with a historical approach. This study found that all the countries analyzed utilized the media to spread disinformation, war propaganda, and control. Borrowing from the Gramscian theory of hegemony, the paper argues that the theory of media and control can be used as a theoretical framework to examine the rule of media to manipulate and control the public opinion.

Keywords:
government; politics; freedom of speech; control

Introduction

This work looks at the 2019 elections as an example of a series of events in the country. In the 2019 elections in Indonesia, Joko Widodo was re-elected, again against Prabowo, a 2014 re-match where social media played a critical role.

In Thailand, the 2019 elections were the first of the 2014 coup by the military junta. Moreover, in the Philippines, local elections were held during Duterte's last term, where there were many cases of control and arrests of journalists who decried Duterte's abuses (Arao, 2021).

Social media and mainstream media have a huge role in democracy (Madrigal, 2017) in nowadays social-political life. In Southeast Asia, social media and media mainstream are important rules for the spread of information such as political ideas (Tapsell, 2020). However, "media" are also used to spread disinformation, propaganda, and to reduce the democracy quality (Watts et al., 2021) through pressure on freedom of expression, controlling what is published on media and social media. Indonesia, Thailand, and Phillips are relevant examples of how disinformation and media control can influence elections and public opinion (Tapsell, 2020).

Firstly, it is important to understand the rule that media and social media have in those countries. According to the report of Freedom

House on NET freedom (Freedom House, 2020), those countries are classified as partly free (Indonesia and Philippines) and not free (Thailand). Moreover, many scholars have analyzed how social media is used in those countries to spread disinformation, where the freedom of expression remains high (Gianan, 2020; Sombatpoons, 2018; Mishra, 2008).

These countries, based on their political system, have different approaches to regulating social media and limiting content that may appear on the internet (Ong & Tapsell, 2020). Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand have been through the election, the last one in 2019, more or less at the same time. According to Tapsell and Ong (2020), it was possible to observe and highlight the role of media and social media in manipulating public opinion, spreading information, and reducing the freedom of expression in the same cases.

The paper examines the impact of media and social media on democracy quality, comparing three distinct countries with three different political systems, and analyzing governments' responses. The study is divided into three sections. The first section provides a review of the existing literature on the topic. Then, the impact of media and social media in the countries of interest is presented, to conclude with an analysis of governments' responses against fake news and the future consequences linked to the phenomenon.

Literature review and Theoretical framework

Studies on media and their impact on society and democracy have been done for decay. In *'The internet in Indonesia's New Democracy '* (Hill & Sen, 2005) there is an analysis of the correlation between the media and the early years of the Soeharto regime and the growth of the Internet and digitization in Indonesia during the dramatic fall of the Soeharto regime in 1998. During the Soeharto era, the media were monopolized by the regime, an authoritarian regime, as Soeharto took over all the media, mainstream, and journal. However, Hill and Sen (2005) acknowledged the importance of the role played by the growth of the Internet in Indonesia and of the new technologies in the future collapse of the regime, due to its incapacity to control the new developing media technology. Tapsell (2017), in " *Media Power in Indonesia, Oligarchs, Citizens, and the Digital Revolution*", highlights the relationship that linked the oligarchs to the media and their impact on politics in Indonesia; in particular, with an accurate analogy of rising media oligarchs during the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono administration and how they have had an impact on the 2004-2014 election. In "*Social media and the 2019 Indonesia election*"(Hui, 2020), the author analyzes how social media interplay with the elector during the 2019 election, with a highlight on the rule of hoax and buzzer during the election campaign.

The Philippines, over the years, have experienced a reduction in freedom of speech. For instance, before the Marcos era (1969-1989), the country was freer, while during his Fime, there was massive control of the media, as well as strong censorship (Rosenberg, 1975; Youngblood, 1981; Dresang, 1985). Sombatpoonsiti (2018), in " *Manipulating Civic Space: Cyber Trolling in Thailand and the Philippines*" sees how cyber troops in those countries manipulate social media with the spread of disinformation. This is especially true in Philippines, where with the Duterte administration, the country sees eroded freedom of speech (Freedom House Net Report, 2020).

In "*Opposing Democracy in the Digital Age: yellow shirts in Thailand''*, (Sinpeng, 2021) analyzes how the yellow shirt or PAD (People's Alliance for Democracy) has had a crucial role in suppressing democracy through social media, supporting the junta at the government. Also important is the role that social media played in favoring the advancement of the Future Forward Party, as demonstrated in

Chattharakul's (2019) analysis " *Social media: Hashtag #Futurista*"

The hegemony theory influences the theoretical framework in this work by Gramsci. The hegemony theory is the essential theory based on Marxist thought in the twentieth century (Bates, 1975). The conceptual definition of hegemony came from the Marxist to indelicate in society's economic foundations, the primary shapers of culture, values, and ideology through controlling society's economic (cultural) structures. The ruling classes also control the political structures and primary ideology, which as Gramsci (1971) noted, access control through the consent of the below, without violence (Altheide, 1984).

Gramsci's theory's critical and fundamental principle is that people are not ruled only by force but also by ideas. Political leadership takes control and has consent given by the leader through diffusion and popularization (establish a hegemony) (Bates, 1975, p. 351-352).

Based on this theory and the definition of hegemony in the media concept, media hegemony is the dominance and manipulation of the aspect of life and choice by a dominant culture (or idea). This is because the hegemony concept of Gramsci starts from a bottom-up forum. That is a forum where part of the working class (to use Gramscian terms of public opinion) towards the ruling and elite class without necessarily using force.

Furthermore, the role of censorship in the media can also be explained through the theory of Gramscian hegemonic (Bunn, 2015). According to hegemony theory by Gramsci, censorship (the act of repression) is a tool and supplement to more complex ideological structures like the alliances between the organ of the press and the ruling elite (Bunn, 2015, p. 35).

Moreover, according to Althusser (1972) the state does not need just repression to keep power and control. In the Althissrer theory, starting from the Gramsci theory, the state uses a positive production of ideology or ISA (Ideological State Apparatus) to make a hegemony through cultural messages like media. Moreover, censorship or police instrument (Repressive State Apparatuses in Althisser terminology) are essential just for the support for the ISAs but are not necessary because the hegemony structure is made by the consensus and not with repression. Moreover, Foucault (1980) also sees how the production of discourse does not work without an instrument and form of repression in support of it.

The control of the media through disinformation and censorship can harm democracy. Starting from Gramsci's theories of hegemony, the establishment to control hegemony passes through tools that can control or modify public opinion thinking.

As Gramsci noted, hegemonic control can occur even without the right use of force. By limiting the freedom of expression, a physically non-violent force is carried out but which harms the freedom of expression as a consequence of the democratic structure of a country.

Figure 1.
Effect of the Egemony on social media and politics
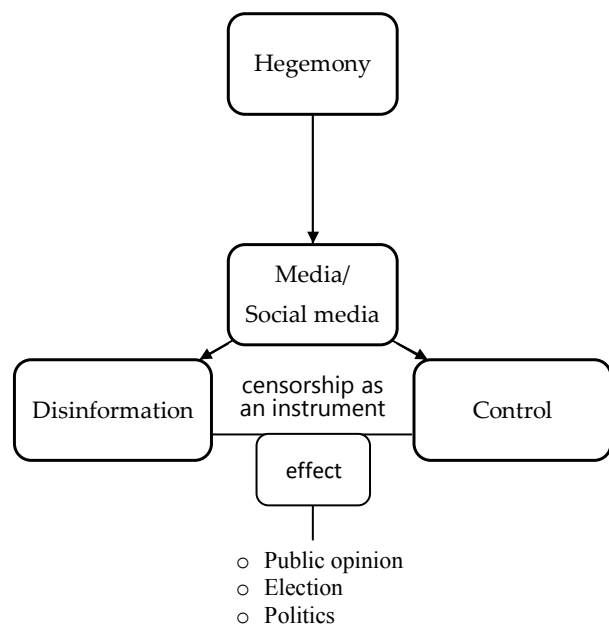
Source: Framework made by the author

Methods

This research reviews previous existing studies to understand the role of social media on democracy and its effect on policy and freedom of expression. The literature analysis uses a semi-systemic approach to trace the historical-political period of the countries analyzed. For the Indonesian case, the texts analyzed are historical-political, particularly to deepen the period during Soeharto (1965-1998) and post-regime (1999-2004). For the most contemporary part, the literature used analyzes the role of the media in Indonesian politics starting from the 2014 elections to the Ahok case and the 2019 elections.

For the Thai case, purely historical and historical literature of the military regimes was analyzed to understand the role of the militarists in the country. On the other hand, more recent analyses were considered to understand current politics and the role of the media in the 2019 election.

The Philippines examines texts during the Marcos' period (1965-1986) and then moves on to the analysis that focuses on Duterte's politics, during the 2016 presidential elections and during the 2019 local elections.

The author used a historical approach—in particular, a historical political, descriptive and prescriptive approach (Laing & McCaffrie, 2020)—to explain how it came to the oligarchy theory in Indonesia and the consequences on today's politics. Moreover, this approach is used to understand, with a historical analysis, the present events by retracing the years of the regimes in the countries under analysis and observing the effects on today's politics, especially through the means of communication, i.e. traditional media (mainstream) and alternative media (Social media).

Moreover, a comparative analysis between Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, three countries with three different political election systems, is used to understand the impact of social media on propaganda and disinformation, focusing on the 2019 election in those countries.

The research questions guiding this study are "*Are social media promoting the anti-democracy establishment? Does social media reduce the democratic quality of a country by limiting its expression through control?*"

Result

The impact of social media

Social media is one of the most used tools for freedom of expression. Social media (or alternative media) such as Twitter and Facebook evolved with the Internet and is used exclusively on the web. However, before the critical impact of social media on the information, propaganda and information panoramics passed through traditional media (or mainstream media) such as television or radio. The main difference between social media and mainstream media is that social media does not tend to be hegemonized by individuals or entities as it appears for traditional media such as television.

In Indonesia, it has been observed that oligarchs objectively control the media (Wijayanto, 2019; Tapsell, 2012, 2017; Nugroho, 2012; Lim, 2012) . The concentration of the media (traditional media) in the hands of a few persons has contributed to creating an oligarchic system through the adoption of an oligopolistic media regime. Moreover, it has also led to an alliance between politics and the media. As noted by Lim (2012), the quest could pose a threat to the democratization of the media in Indonesia. Unlike social media (or alternative media), mainstream media is under an oligopolistic regime. Only a few companies control the mainstream platform (Lim, 2012).

Furthermore, in Indonesia, there has been a tendency on the part of journalists to favor the government and parties, lowering the quality of the media. Also, as Tapsell (2012) and Haryanto (2011) have noted, media owners tend to pursue economic and political interests

Table 1.
Comparative table on Censorship, Disinformation and Media Control

	Indonesia	Thailand	Philippines
Censorship	Censorship and blocking of the media to limit "disinformation"	Direct censorship of online conversations Self-Censorship by anti-establishment parties to avoid repercussions	n/d
Disinformation	Disinformation used with anti-Chinese rhetoric Role of cyber troops to spread Anti-Islam disinformation against a political candidate	Disinformation used from the support movement group of the monarchy and from the anti-establishment group	Disinformation against political opponents through the use of influencers
Media control	Mainstream media tends to follow the politics of the establishment or the parties they support An oligarchic system as TVs are generally controlled by a narrow group of people	IOs through control of the media report to the authorities any criticisms of the establishment	Propaganda ideology: the war against drugs, anti-colonial sentiment, and nationalism Use of cyber troops for control and violence on social media

Source: Comparative table made by the author

through self-censorship. Before social media advancement, television was one of Indonesia's most important tools for party propaganda.

With Joko Widodo, especially during his first mandate, social media is beginning to play a more important role, to the point of becoming a political tool. However, the new media are also the vehicle for anti-policy and repressive disinformation. The Ahok case and the defamatory campaign against Joko Widodo pre-elections 2019, for instance, demonstrate how social media, through the hoax, can manipulate public opinion with a negative effect on the election (Hui, 2020; Lim, 2017; Tapsell, 2017).

Moreover, Thailand demonstrates how social media can become tools to accumulate votes and participate in political actions (Ganjanakhundee, 2020; Chattharakul, 2019; McCargo, 2017; Sinpeng, 2017). The newborn party FPP got many votes during the election, particularly from the new generations growing up under the dictator regime. Furthermore, social media, being not hegemonized by anyone, tend to be more under control by the authorities. Moreover, the criticisms of the crown and the military junta tend to be reported to authorize and banned from

social networks with often repercussions and repression for those who protest against the authorities (Soombatpoonsiri, 2018; Liu, 2014).

According to Tapsell and Ong (2019), the Philippines cases can show how social media is used for propaganda. The cyber troops (made up of first mega influencers and then micro-influencers) are keen to support Duterte's policy by supporting his anti-liberal and anti-drug policies.

Through this analysis comparing three countries of South-East Asia, it is analyzed how social media, even if they tend to give broader freedom of speech and help the freedom of expression, is also used as a political tool against political opponents through fake news. In addition, more authoritarian regimes tend to a more brutal control of social media platforms, with arrests and repression in the event of publication or comment not in line with the current government.

Discussion
Indonesia

After the end of the New Order which saw the end of the Soeharto regime (1965-1998), new theories have been made on the political

system in Indonesia. According to Robison and Hadiz, after the Soeharto regime, Indonesia's policy is controlled by oligarchs (Robison & Hadiz, 2004). According to Winters (2011), oligarchs have an extreme concentration of wealth in Indonesia's countries that started to grow during the Soeharto regime. After the fall of the Soeharto regime, oligarchies were able to take control of the political file of the country because of the enormous uncertain of wealth in their hands, and in particular, through the control of political parties in the country (Winters, 2011, p. 33).

Tapsell (2015) sees how media oligarchs participate and support candidates during the election. This participation of the media oligarchies in the political life of the country, according to Robison and Hadiz (2013), is colling the phenomena of "media oligarchy."

Oligarchs began to dominate the media scenarios during the country's digitalization period; they have affiliations with parties, for example Surya Paloh owned MetroTV and founder of NasDem party (National Democratic Party) (Tapsell, 2015). Surya Paloh and Metro TV played an important role in Indonesian politics, especially influencing public opinion, during the 2004-2014 elections, under the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono known as SBY.

However, after the second period of SBY and the coming up of the "man of people " Joko Widodo, known as Jokowi, something has changed. Firstly, Joko Widodo beat a member of the Indonesian elite in the election, Prabowo Subianto, questioning the actual power of the oligarchs (Aspinall, 2013). Secondly, social media was popularizing in the country and beginning to play an increasingly important role in Indonesian politics and became a problem for the old generation of oligarchies. This is because, according to Tapsell (2015), social media platforms there are spaces where people can share information without dogma, and this was clear during the campaign

election in 2012, where Jokowi was involved by a wave of content on social media (Video, CAMEO), obviously in Jokowi's favor, that makes herself a "phenomena" (Tapsell, 2015, p. 35) on social media. Since this, social media has been a primary rule in elections in Indonesia (Thornley, 2014). Therefore, Jokowi was able to understand how to use social media to increase his political popularity.

However, this high import of digitalization and the spread of propaganda through social media have seen the growth of hoaxes, disinformation, hate speech, and propaganda. The case of Tjahaha Purnama, more popular by the name Ahok, is one of the most notorious examples of how social media can have a strong impact on public opinion (Lim, 2017). Ahok, a Christian of Chinese descent, was the Governator of Jakarta in Indonesia where the majority are Muslim, replacing Jokowi who had won the presidential election during his mandate in 2017. During a speech in Kepuluan Seribu Ahok, he was accused of blasphemy against Islam.

Very quickly, hate speech and propaganda against Ahok were carried out by the toughest Islamic community, via social media (Lim, 2017, p. 6). The impact of social media had a relevant impact on the government elections where Ahok lost against Anies Baswedan backed by a hard-line Islamist group (Herdiansah et al., 2018), and was also sentenced to 2 years in prison for blasphemy.

These cases had consequences on politics in Indonesia. First, it is possible to understand how public opinion can be influenced by social media, especially those who share information are Islamic movement groups that have an important rule in the society as are Nahdlatul Ulama (UN) or Muhammadiyah (Herdiansah et al., 2018).

Moreover, it led to the rise of hoaxes and buzzers (people who are paid to share information\disinformation about a one-person or candidate) for promoting one candidate or defaming him. According to Lim, buzzers have an important role in the dynamics

of both local and national elections (Lim, 2017), as has been shown by the 2019 election in Indonesia.

Ahok was also a victim of the cyber troops. The Muslim Cyber Army (MCA) (Juniarto, 2018) traced people who are considered by MCA to insult Islam by putting information about that person and putting shame on them (Hui, 2020).

In the case of Ahok, that was in parallel with the local election for the government of Jakarta, a situation that was already problematic after the national election in 2014. In 2014, social media made Jokowi a phenomenon as noted by Tapsell (Tapsell, 2015), and in 2017 it was used against Ahok (Lim, 2017, p. 10).

In the 2019 election, the important rule of the hoaxes

During the national election in 2019, Jokowi was re-elected president. Jokowi beat his opponent Prabowo Subianto in an election where social media had an important rule for the result of the election. This election was the most complex in the history of Indonesia after the end of the regime (Nursalikah, 2019). This is because local and national elections were held at the same time. Moreover, social media and cyber troops had an important role in sharing disinformation during the campaign.

According to Hui during the 2019 campaign, social media, like WhatsApp and Instagram, have been the center media for the sharing of information. Jokowi and his vice-president Ma'ruf Amin have also used Facebook for like campaigns (Hui, 2020). Therefore, social media was used for "war propaganda" (IPAC, 2019), which has already happened during the hate speech campaign against Ahok and in 2019 against Jokowi, when, during the election campaign (Hui, 2020, p. 159), a hashtag like #gantipresident (change the president) was spread from opposition parties like the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (Prosperity and Justice Party).

Moreover, buzzers and cyber troops are responsible for manipulating public opinion (Bradshaw & Howard, 2017). For instance, Buzzers are paid to share and promote, or to defame and circulate fake news in a political contest. This has had an impact on the 2019 election, and as noted by Tanpsell and Ong, during the election, many were the posting by cyber troops for manipulating public opinion (Tanpsell & Ong, 2020).

An example is the use of misinformation against Jokowi. Fake news about Jokowi started circulating on the Internet. Jokowi was "accused" of being a supporter of communism, of not being a true Muslim because of Chinese and Christian descent, and wanting banned to teach religions in school and eliminating the call to prayer (Tanpsell & Ong, 2020, p. 20).

In the largest Muslim-majority country in the world, this can be decisive for the election. If we take the 2019 elections as an example, the Jokowi-Amin coalition, less conservative and more avant-garde than the Prabowo - Sandiaga coalition, we see how Jokowi and Amin win the elections with a minimum difference of votes.

However, the effect of social media and misinformation was very relevant. After the result of the election, protests were held in Jakarta against the reaction of Jokowi, many pushed by the spread of fake news, and the government blocked social media to reduce the spread of false news against Jokowi's government (WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram were shot down) and the same time the opposition led by Prabowo has intervened (through social media and media) to calm the protests in the capital.

Thailand

The history of Thai politics is complex. Since the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932, Thailand's politics have been under a complicated situation between the military, the population, and the monarchy. In the years after the coup against the monarchy, Thai Politics saw 20 prime ministers, 13

unconstitutional attacks on the government, and 80% of the time from 1932 to 1972 under the junta where the military kept power with strong repressive action (Neher, 1992, p. 586).

From 1973 to the end of 1980, Thai politics saw the repressive government of Thanin Kraivichien with his anti-communist policy and the junta government that overthrew Kraivichien because to repressive also for the army (Neher, 1992). At the end of 1980, a light of hope was glimpsed for the democratization of the country; however, with the coup d'état in 1991, Thailand fell back again into a period of repression under the military dictatorship (Neher, 1995; Maisrikrod, 1993; Paribatra, 1993), resulting in one of the largest protests against the military regime, led by General Suchinda Kraprayoon, known as the Black May Uprising (Sinpeng, 2021). The protest opened the way for democratization in the country (Neher 1995), democratization that was consolidated in the 1997 constitution, the "People's Constitution" (Dressel, 2009), considered the freest and good for the government (Sinpeng, 2021).

At the end of the 1990s and the start of 2000, Thai politics seems an important event. First, the financial crisis and the rise of Thaksin Shinawatra and of the Thai Rak Thai party (Thai Love Thai), the controversial leader that was in power in Thailand after having won the election in 2004. Thaksin was able to attract votes from the rural part of the population (Phongpaichit & Bakerand, 2008).

In the same year emerged the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), which will have an important role in supporting the military rule and monarchy, and the fall of Shinawatra will be exiled (Sinpeng, 2021; Phongpaichit & Bakerand, 2008) after the coup d'etat in 2006 and the suspension of the Constitution of 1997.

However, the Council for National and Security led by general Sonthi Boonyaratglin did a coup against the Tanksin administration, to protect the democracy and the stability of the country, that during that years have to see instability for the protest by the PAD or Yellow Shirt (pro-military) and the Red Shirt (pro-Thanksin) (Lertchoosakul, 2020).

After having overthrown Thaksin, limiting the pro-Thaksin People Power party (PPP), in 2007 was enacted a new constitution that limited parliamentary and prime minister powers and gave power to the army (Phongpaichit & Bakerand 2008). The years from post-coup 2006 to 2011 saw a short period by Abhisit Vejjajiva when the situation in Thailand started to get complicated; with strong repression by the military, the politics were polarized into two parts, pro-Thaksin or against the military and who support the military and the monarchy. This is more noted with the name Yellow Shirts vs Red Shirts where the Yellow is the movement pro-establishment and red are who support Thaksin (Kongkirati, 2014).

After the election in 2011, Yingluck Shinawatra, sister of Thaksin, won the election. However, she was overthrown by the army and Prayut Chan-o-Cha became the leader of the NCPO (National Council for Peace and Order) and the Royal Army.

Prayut becomes prime minister at inter, a role he still holds today after having overthrown the inter prime minister, Niwatthamrong Boonsongpaisan, who replaced Yingluck. This, according to Soprazetti, was a coup more repressive, compared to the last one in 2006 (Soprazetti, 2014).

Election 2019, Future Forward Party and social media

As for Indonesia, social media and the media mainstream have an important role in Thai society. The difference in Indonesia is, for many reasons, the rule of the military in the social/political life of Thailand. This with the rule of social media needs to be understood to have a full situation of how Thai politics work, and what effect it has on Thai society.

The coup date in 2014 was announced through Facebook and Twitter accounts

of NCPO, for the first time in Thai history (Nyblade et al., 2015). In a country like Thailand where the military has strong power, this can make a difference in the spread of information or the mitigation of the information.

According to Tapsell and Ong, Thailand uses a state-sponsored model for spreading disinformation through mainstream media and social media (Tapsell & Ong, 2020). For Thailand, there are volunteers called Information operations (IOs) that, like the buzzers in Indonesia, are part of what is called the cyber troops. These cyber troops report any critics of the authority if there is criticism against the monarchy and the junta (Ong & Tapsell, 2020, p. 15).

Social media had an important role in Thai politics especially for the movement and mobilization (Sinpeng, 2021) of the information, in both pro-military and pro-Thaksin (Nyblade, et al., 2015). Moreover, Thailand has seen faster growth in ICT and one of the majority users of Facebook after Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam (Statista, 2019). Social media was also used by PDRC, People's Democratic Reform Committee, the successor of PAD, People's Alliance for Democracy.

During the PAD movement protest, social media did not already rise in the country (Sinpeng, 2021), however, it was during the conflict between the PAD and the movement pro-Shinawatra that the internet and cyber troops started to rule in Thailand politics (Sombatpoonsiri, 2018), for spreading information pro-monarchy (and military). The protests and the rise of cyber troops are factors that slow down the democratic transition in the country. Moreover, the democratic transition was deftly stopped until the future election in 2019 during the coup d'etat by the military junta (Sinpeng, 2021).

Social media have also had an impact on the 2019 election, the first after the coup in 2014. The reason is that during this election there is a strong intervention of the junta. Important is

the 2017 constitution, it requires that part of the parliament be composed of military personnel (Lertchoosakul, 2020), and the rise and fall of the Future Forward Party (FFP) and the starting of the protests in Thailand, especially though the young generation.

Important fact after 2014 and before the election in 2019 was the constitution of 2017 to increase the powers of institutions not elected by the people and to give the military junta a wide range of manoeuvres, the change of monarchy, and the coronation of Rama X (Lertchoosakul, 2020). The new party, the Future Forward Party, clashed in elections with other parties, such as the Pheu Thai Party, heir to Swinawatrian policies, and the pro-military Palang Pracharath Party.

How is it connected with social media and the mitigation of the information? According to Liu (2014) and Sombatpoonsiri (2018), the spread of cyber troops in Thailand starts with the "war" between the Yellow and Red shirts.

The difference between those movements is that Yellow Shirts are movements like People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), pro-monarchy, and anti-Shinawatra, and Red Shirts are movements like United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) pro-Shinawatra and anti-regime (Sombatpoonsiri, 2018).

According to Liu, the use of online platforms to express the anti-establishment sentiment (in this case the military and the elites who support them) were frowned upon by the establishment itself (Liu, 2014). However, the response by the elite was the Computer Crime Act after the 2006 coup and the use of volunteers for monitoring the dissidents on the internet and reporting to the authorities. Hence, during 2013-2016, the use of lese-majesty against criticism and ordinary citizens (Soombatpoonsiri, 2018).

The different use of social media can reflect the Thai political situation. Platforms like Facebook are usually used in Thai politics, the

pro-monarchy yellows shirt, and even the anti-regime, although without a direct confrontation. Twitter on the other hand is used for direct conflict (Ong & Tapsell, 2020). Looking at social media as a means of propaganda and freedom/limitation of expression, Sinpeng analyzes how social media affects the slowdown of the democratic process, especially after the successor of the PAD movement, the PDRC (People's Democratic Reform Committee) had taken the reins of the pro-monarchy protests, in a society now dominated by social media and the media (Sinpeng, 2021).

The analysis by Sinpeng shows how PAD and after PDRC, and his leader, Suthep Taugsuban, can use social media for anti-democratization, in particular during the conflict between the PDRC and United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) and Pheu Thai Party (Yingluck Shinawatra party), noted with the Yellow-Red conflict.

The status of politics in Thailand, before the 2014 coup was hyperpolarized (Sinpeng, 2021), tended to be like this until the 2019 election. The 2019 election saw a strong impact on social media and first times voters, the young generation that before this election was grown up under the military dictatorship and was tired of the war between Yellow and Red or the political conflict Pheu Thai Party and the Palang Pracharath Party (Chattharakul, 2019). However, according to Human Right Watch (2019), the junta created a system of repression during the regime, especially on media. In particular, parties and politicians who openly criticized the regime during the electoral campaign were punished. These repressions were conducted through the NCPO Announcement 97/2014 and NCPO announcement 103/2014. This regulation has prohibited any criticism of NCPO and the spread of information that could cause instability. Moreover, the media are obligated to share information about issues by the junta. Therefore, the 103/2014 not only prohibits the

publication of news considered safe by the junta but, through the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), the junta can intervene with the closure of the channels considered by the junta to be dangerous for the regime (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

During the campaign for the 2019 election, the NBTC announced the suspension few TV channels like Voice TV after the account of causing public confusion and inciting conflict (Human Rights, 2019; Prachatai English, 2019).

During the election, the rise of the Future Forward Party (FFP) was unexpected, becoming the third party most voted for after the Pheu Thai Party (PTP) and the Palang Pracharath Party (PPT). The upcoming of the FFP was linked with the young figure of the leader, Thanathor Juangroongrungkit, and the massive use of social media, which attracted many votes at the polls, especially from the young generation (Chattharakul, 2019, p. 171). The FFP uses Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to interact with the voters (Lawattanatraku, 2019). Thanathor later became a phenomenon of social media that integrate with voters (Chattharakul, 2019), like the hashtag #FahRakPho (Fah loves sugar daddy), borrowed from the famous soap opera in Thailand, where Fah, a young lady, loves Pho, a mature man; in this contest, Fah is the young voters and Pho is Thanathor, and this resonated with the voter with the hashtag #PhokoRakPha (In english : Daddy also loves Fah) (Sakukjit, 2019).

The FFP attracted 6.3 million voters in 2019, making the ruling elites worry because the FFP was a threat to the establishment accused of wanting to advocate republicanism in the country (Sombatpoonsiri, 2021). To defend the status quo, the Constitutional Court dissolved the FFP by unleashing revolts and demonstrations against the regime (Sombatpoonsiri, 2020).

As under a regime, Thailand has experienced the limitation of expression and the use of disinformation to give reality

to the propaganda of the military junta (Ganjanakhundee 2020). The years after the coup saw a tightening of freedom of expression. With the creation of the MDES (Ministry of Digital Economy and Society) and the Computer Crimes Act, anyone who was deemed inappropriate by the government could be accused of disseminating false information (Ganjanakhundee, 2020).

During the election, the FFP was attacked through social media with the use of disinformation and fake news (Ong & Tapsell, 2020), because the FFP was a real threat to the status quo of the military. The most famous attack was the fake news about the conspiracy between the leader of the FFP and former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, published on Nation TV (Ong& Tapsell, 2020).

Philippines

The Philippines are one of the most dynamic countries in terms of manipulation of media and propaganda (Sambatpoonsiri, 2018), using violence to control freedom of the press and freedom of expression (Article 19 & CMFR 2005).

The Philippines ' political structure is based on the experience of colonialism, especially during the US occupation (Nodello, 1987), where the president is elected directly for 6 years and cannot be re-elected. According to Dresang (1985), the liberty of the press in the Philippines was one of the freest in the world before the Martial Law imposed by Marcos.

From 1965 to 1989, the Philippines were under the regime of Ferdinand E. Marcos, and during this period, the 1935 constitution based on the US Commonwealth was replaced by the 1972 constitution and the Martian Law with the Presidential Proclamation NO.1081 (Article 19 & CMFR 2005).

During the Martial Law, all the media were under the control of the regime, many journalists were put in jail, and many newspapers and media TV were shut down (Youngblood, 1981; Rosenberg, 1974-1975). Initially, the regime had justified such acts as a precaution against possible infiltrations into the country by the communist and kept the social and economic growth (Luis and Kabatay, 2001; Rosenberg, 1974-19750).

However, according to Lent (1975, 1976), Marcos wanted to eliminate the oligarchs from taking control of the society.

After a series of events, were also the Chattolch Church even part and the death of a prominent figure in the regime's opposition Benigno Aquino, in 1986, the election saw Marcos against Corazon Aquino, wife of Benigno. After a few protests and demonstrations, Corazon became president of the Philippines and the Marcos regime ended.

After the regime, the Philippines became an electoral democracy (Sombatpoonsiri, 2018). However as Anderson noted in 1988, the country was dominated by elites that made the Philippines into an oligarchic democracy. This elite accommodates liberal narratives, like human rights and liberty, for marginalizing the real issue at the time, the urgency of agrarian reform and redistribution of land (Thompson, 2016).

This liberal narrative collapsed in 2016 with the election of Rodrigo Duterte as the president of the Philippines. According to Plagemann and Ufen (2017), Duterian politics comes closest to an illiberal idea of politics.

The main reason why social media has been important during the Duterte presidency is linked to the new social media growth in the country (Tapsell, 2020), and also to the Duterte Troops, bloggers, and influencers that support the president. Moreover, because the mainstream media was not pro-Duterte, many journalists were attacked online by the Duterte supporters, and a reality was being created where, through the new media, groups differed from the narrative of the old media, creating an online army that supported the president made up by bloggers and influencers (Cabanes & Cornelio 2017).

According to Combinido and Curato (2021), crucial for understanding the rise of disinformation in the Philippines is the political culture in the production of disinformation (Combinido & Curato, 2021, p. 25). The unstable organization of the parties in the country puts political personalities (like Duterte) through the outcomes on TV, in a position more vital than the parties themselves (Quimpo, 2007). According to Pertierra (2017), Duterte was a beneficiary of this system where television performances helped him to build a charismatic personage connected to the voters through the fear of drugs, creating the narrative of the Philippines as a narco-state and starting the narrative that the Philippines need to be safe for drugs (Cambinido & Curato, 2021; Pertierra, 2017; Evangelista & Curato, 2016,).

The 2016 election saw a change in political narrative, where the center was the war on drugs and narcos, anti-corruption, and nationalism. As noted by Curato (2017), what happened with the 2016 election was different from the normal narrative of politics that enforces the populist narrative (Duterte) against the elite and journalists (Ong & Tapsell, 2020).

According to Cabañes, Anderson, and Ong, (2019), the spread of disinformation in the Philippines was easy to make because of the penetration of fell tell stories in the country. Supporters of DDS spread social media propaganda for Duterte. Moreover, the keyboard army, people that are paid to open fake accounts and spread disinformation, helped Duterte during his campaign (Freedom House, 2017). The Supporters of Duterte continue to support him even after the elections, attacking critics, especially those who criticized the president's war on drugs (Sombatpoonsiri, 2018; Singpell, 2016,).

The 2019 local election in The Philippines

Differently from Indonesia and Thailand, in the Philippines, there were no presidential or national elections, but local ones, since the presidential elections were held in 2016 (Ong & Tapsell, 2020). During the 2016 elections, the rhetoric that the Durterian propaganda told was based on an anti-colonialism sentiment, war on drugs, and nationalism (Teehankee, 2016) which through social media gave him a wide range of listening, winning the elections also from the media point of view (Sinpeg, 2016).

In addition, his supporters attacked opponents (the elite from their point of view, who complained about Durtere's war on drugs and possible violations of human rights), accusing them of divulging false news to spot Durtere from the political scene (Sombatpoonsiri, 2018), especially through bloggers and macro-influencers (with more than a million followers) (Ong & Tapsell, 2020).

The use of disinformation was used extensively against the opposition, in particular with the use of memes that ridiculed polite opposites (Ong & Cabañes, 2018). However, the 2019 local election saw a change in the use of macro influencer propaganda to micro/nano influencers (Ong & Tapsell, 2020).

According to Ong, Tapsell, and Curato (2019), nano and micro-influencers have a more near and interactive relationship with the fans, with a more intensive spread of disinformation and propaganda, as was the cases where this micro group spreading disinformation on Overseas Filipino Worker, normally conspiracy theory or anti-propaganda establishment and anti-mainstream media (OFW) (Ong & Tapsell, 2020, p. 18).

Moreover, According to Combinido and Curato 2021, Duterte uses a Cyber-Tokhang. Tokhang is the name composed of the word toktok dan hangyo and is referent to the act of the police to knock the doors of drug use suspects. Cyber Tokhang is used for violence through social media against those who are suspects of regime critics with harassment, sexualization, and direct threats (Combinido & Curato, 2021, p. 30). Cyber Tokhang also

works as a tool of censorship because the use of force represses the liber opinion of people in the name of the narrative made by the regime.

Media in Indonesia Thailand and the Philippines

The Gramscian theory of hegemony explains how power can be controlled and created without physical force but using specific rhetoric that tends to hegemonize the social structure of the society. This concept is well present in the use of media mainstream and social media in the countries studied: Indonesia, Thailand, and The Philippines.

In the countries examined, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, media mainstream and social media have an important influence on public opinion. In Indonesia, the phenomenon of the oligarch media (Robison & Hadiz, 2013) that developed during the period of the country's digitalization played an essential role in the first phase of post-Soeharto Indonesia politics during the elections (Tapsell, 2015). According to Lim (2012), this was the period where the "league of thirteen" monopolizing the Indonesian media system threatened democracy in the country.

However, during the penetration and development of social media, while on the one hand, social media played an important role in destabilizing the media controlled by oligarchs, on the other hand, they played an essential role, especially in the spreading of disinformation and hate rhetoric speech as happened during the 2017 government elections between Ahok and Baswedan, with influencing public opinion with the distribution of fake news, disinformation, hate speech, and rhetoric anti-chines propaganda (Herdiansah et al., 2018; Lim, 2017). At the same time, through social media, the creation of cyber troops as buzzer in Indonesia or Cyber Tokhang in The Philippines has an important role to spread disinformation against a political opponent (Hui, 2020; Lim, 2017).

Misinformation through the media also plays a vital role in Thailand, primarily through manipulating public opinion, for instance during the 2014 coup d'etat in the country (Nyblade et al., 2015). The disinformation in Thailand under the regime was aimed at favouring and propaganda in favour of the military regime in power, where censorship was used primarily against movements and groups anti-regime.

Therefore, manipulation of information via social media is adopted in the Philippines. Media violence is used against political opponents to control freedom of expression against the opposition. However, the more critical things in the Philippines are the use of social media for spreading the rhetoric of the Philippines as a narco-trafficking country and the war on drugs.

In all three countries compared, there are groups of cyber troops, buzzers in Indonesia, IOs in Thailand, and the Cyber Tokhang in the Philippines, which spread disinformation and media violence against political opponents, such as in the case of Indonesia and the Philippines. A control role must bring criticism against the regime, as in Thailand and the Philippines. Furthermore, Indonesia and Thailand use censorship in particular to mitigate the dissemination of information that could go against the establishment's policies.

Disinformation is used in all three countries analyzed, primarily through rhetoric against specific ethnic, religious, and political opponents.

Conclusion

Disinformation and propaganda are instruments used by political actors to keep power and control. With the growth of social media, cyber troops are coming up. In Indonesia, it was used by the opposition but also by the state itself. Indonesia's spread of disinformation is top-down and state-driven.

Through the case of the Indonesian elections, it was seen how disinformation

played an important role in the perception of public opinion, as seen in the Ahok case and the smear campaign against Joko Widodo in 2019. The junta in Thailand has total control of the media mainstream, even if social media have more freedom compared to the national media mainstream. The junta keeps its power by controlling social media and shutting down the internet and abolishing parties like the FFP. The Philippines uses patriotic rhetoric on social media through cyber troops with rhetoric on nationalism, war on drugs, and anti-elite establishment. The media are probably one of the most important instruments of freedom of expression. FFP's rise in Thailand starts with social media; to criticize any oligarchic attitudes of the government in Indonesia is something easier now with social media than before through the media mainstream. However, it has become an instrument of disinformation and control, especially during election campaigns and against political opponents.

Acknowledgement

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