

Indonesia country brief

Media package

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About the Global Coalition for Tech Justice

The [Global Coalition for Tech Justice](#) is a newly formed global movement to ensure Big Tech plays its role in protecting elections and citizens' rights and freedoms across the world, particularly in the global majority where companies – Meta, Google, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok et al – have been negligent in dealing with the impacts of their social media and messaging products.

In 2024, more than 2 billion people will be entitled to vote in 65 elections across the world, in the biggest and most significant global megacycle of elections so far this century. This will include some of the world's largest democracies like the United States, the European Union, India, Mexico and Indonesia, countries in active democratic decline like Tunisia, and in active oppression of citizens' freedoms. But the relentless spread of online disinformation, hate speech, abuse and manipulation threatens to undermine efforts to advance democracy and freedoms.

About Digital Action

[Digital Action](#) is the convenor and organiser of the Global Coalition for Tech Justice. Since 2019, Digital Action has been mobilising a global network of partners to demand better standards from the governments and corporations responsible for our digital environments.

Indonesia's February 2024 Elections: Context and key facts

On 14 February 2024, Indonesia, the world's fourth largest democracy and the most populous Muslim country, is holding general elections. Up to 205 million people are expected to cast their ballot¹ in the world's biggest single-day ballot to elect a president, vice president and almost 20,000 representatives to national, provincial and district parliaments.²

¹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/13/indonesia-announces-presidential-election-candidates>

² <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/10/05/indonesia-s-2024-presidential-election-could-be-last-battle-of-titans-pub-90711>

The presidential election has become a three horse race. Prabowo Subianto, the defence minister under the incumbent president Joko Widodo, known as Jokowi, is leading in the polls.³ Close behind him is Ganjar Pranowo, a former governor of one of the country's most populous provinces, followed by Anies Baswedan, the ex-governor of Jakarta.⁴ After a decade in office Joko Widodo will be stepping down.⁵

The island nation is Southeast Asia's largest economy and a key partner for the United States in its ambition to thwart China's influence in the region.⁶

Social media: Key facts

Indonesia has 275 million inhabitants⁷ and some estimate that around 224 million people were accessing the internet in the country in 2022.⁸ The figure is expected to grow to about 270 million by 2028.⁹

Facebook is the preferred social media platform, with almost 42% of Indonesians using the app as of 2022. This is followed by Instagram, which is used by 29%, YouTube accounts for 10% and TikTok almost 9%.¹⁰ Still, Indonesia is home to TikTok's second largest user base – after the US – with an average scrolling time of 29 hours per month.¹¹

An economic powerhouse, Indonesia has become an attractive destination for Meta, TikTok, X/Twitter, Google, YouTube and other tech companies, all of which have signed up to Indonesia's strict content law, which was announced in 2020.¹² Campaigners have warned the rules threaten freedom of expression and amounted to a compromise by the big tech sector

³ https://www.economist.com/the-world-ahead/2023/11/13/indonesia-will-elect-a-new-president-in-february?utm_medium=cpc.adword.pd&utm_source=google&ppccampaignID=18151738051&ppcadID=&utm_campaign=a.22brand_pmax&utm_content=conversion.direct-response.anonymous&qad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiAtt2tBhBDEiwALZuhAFwkByQj4V83sypLJonR1hGSTi2pNHNkkTixFIhGswH3hmARLUF3wBoC3J4QAvD_BwE&qclsrc=aw.ds

⁴ <https://time.com/6328273/indonesia-presidential-election-2024-contenders/>

⁵ https://www.economist.com/the-world-ahead/2023/11/13/indonesia-will-elect-a-new-president-in-february?utm_medium=cpc.adword.pd&utm_source=google&ppccampaignID=18151738051&ppcadID=&utm_campaign=a.22brand_pmax&utm_content=conversion.direct-response.anonymous&qad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiAtt2tBhBDEiwALZuhAFwkByQj4V83sypLJonR1hGSTi2pNHNkkTixFIhGswH3hmARLUF3wBoC3J4QAvD_BwE&qclsrc=aw.ds

⁶ <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/commentary/indonesia-presidential-election-2024-suharto-deepfake-ai-4076531>

⁷ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=ID>

⁸ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1343136/indonesia-most-used-social-media-platforms/#:-:text=According%20to%20a%20survey%20on,approximately%2041.6%20percent%20of%20respondents>

⁹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/254456/number-of-internet-users-in-indonesia/>

¹⁰ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1343136/indonesia-most-used-social-media-platforms/#:-:text=According%20to%20a%20survey%20on,approximately%2041.6%20percent%20of%20respondents>

¹¹ <https://www.economist.com/asia/2024/02/01/tiktok-is-a-key-battleground-in-indonesias-election>

¹² <https://www.ft.com/content/6f9eebf5-6025-44b6-8815-9e0ee4096726>

seeking to retain access to an important market.¹³ Authorities can order content that disturbs “society” or “public order” to be taken down and demand access to company data.¹⁴

Social media trends and threads ahead of the 2024 ballot

AI-generated content

Like in the Bangladesh and Taiwan elections, which took place in January, in Indonesia too AI-generated deepfakes have become a fixture across social media platforms in the leadup to the ballots. The most startling of all, and possibly most popular, included the AI-generated video of General Suharto, the Indonesian dictator who passed away in 2008.¹⁵

“I am President Suharto, the second president of Indonesia, inviting you to elect representatives of the people from Golkar,” the digital Suharto says in the video, which was posted on 6 January on Instagram and X/Twitter by Erwin Aksa, the party’s deputy chairman. Reportedly created by the Golkar party, the video has been viewed over 4.5 million times.

But the Suharto deepfake aside, all three presidential candidates and their running mates appeared in AI-modified videos, which some say have the potential to influence the outcome of the election.¹⁶

Despite the deluge of AI-generated disinformation on social media, the country’s General Elections Commission (KPU) declared that it has no jurisdiction to regulate AI technology.¹⁷ The hands off approach has made the situation worse, according to Rizka Herdiani, researcher at Center for Digital Society (CfDS). “*Since the General Election Commission or KPU didn’t establish any regulation on the use of AI in the election, its presence has accelerated and amplified the spread of misinformation and/or disinformation on social media,*” she said.

And Big Tech companies are not doing enough to curb the spread and impact of AI-generated disinformation, said Nuurrianti Jalli, Assistant Professor of Professional Practice at the School of Media and Strategic Communications at Oklahoma State University. “*Platforms should label AI content, proactively and strictly implement mis/disinfo policies, and be accountable for failing to immediately react to misuse of their platform during politically charged periods such as elections.*”

¹³ <https://www.ft.com/content/6f9eebf5-6025-44b6-8815-9e0ee4096726>

¹⁴ <https://www.ft.com/content/6f9eebf5-6025-44b6-8815-9e0ee4096726>

¹⁵ <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=17927196>

¹⁶ <https://www.context.news/ai/deepfakes-deceive-voters-from-india-to-indonesia-before-elections>

¹⁷ <https://thediplomat.com/2023/11/artificial-intelligence-disinformation-and-the-2024-indonesian-elections/>

Pandering to Millennials

In an effort to appeal to young voters – over 52% of Indonesians are aged between 18 and 39 years old¹⁸ – all three presidential candidates took to social media long before the official campaign kicked off in November 2023, with some videos racking up millions of views.¹⁹

Video-sharing platforms like Tik Tok and Instagram have quickly become battlegrounds for the youth vote, according to experts.²⁰²¹ Analysts have also pointed to the widespread use of *buzzers* known as trolls or cyber troops, who are paid to spread falsehoods and tarnish the public's opinion of the candidate.²² This included rumours that the educational credentials of Prabowo's running mate – the son of the incumbent president Jokowi – were fake.²³

TikTok has also become a powerful image-changing medium, best demonstrated by the makeover of presidential frontrunner Prabowo Subianto. The 72-year-old candidate is the leader of the Gerindra party – the third largest party in parliament – and the sole contender with ties to the Suharto dictatorship which ran from 1967 and 1998.²⁴ Prabowo is a former special-forces commander, dismissed from the military following allegations of involvement in torture,²⁵ and Suharto's former son-in-law.

But that's most likely not how he's being viewed by younger voters who don't know about his past. To most of Indonesia's TikTok users he's a "cute" grandpa dancing awkwardly in videos – some of which have gone viral. Experts warn that the ubiquitous use of TikTok has reduced politics to memes and videos that put personality over policy, further raising concerns about the state of Indonesia's democracy, which has suffered under president Jokowi.²⁶

“Some voters choose a certain candidate for bite-size "information" or clips of the presidential debates that are posted on platforms such as TikTok. So, yes, it can influence the results of the elections,” said CfDS's Rizka Herdiani.

The video sharing platform is also being used to spread AI-generated disinformation on a mass scale. A recent example includes an AI-modified TikTok video of a social media post by musician Taylor Swift purportedly thanking Prabowo Subianto – the candidate expected to win the presidential race – “for helping me”. The video had been in circulation at least between 31

¹⁸ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/next-generation-indonesia#:~:text=With%2052%25%20of%20Indonesia's%20population,will%20shape%20the%20nation's%20future.>

¹⁹ <https://www.straitstimes.com/multimedia/graphics/2024/01/indonesia-election/index.html?shell>

²⁰ <https://www.straitstimes.com/multimedia/graphics/2024/01/indonesia-election/index.html?shell>

²¹ <https://www.economist.com/asia/2024/02/01/tiktok-is-a-key-battleground-in-indonesias-election>

²² <https://www.straitstimes.com/multimedia/graphics/2024/01/indonesia-election/index.html?shell>

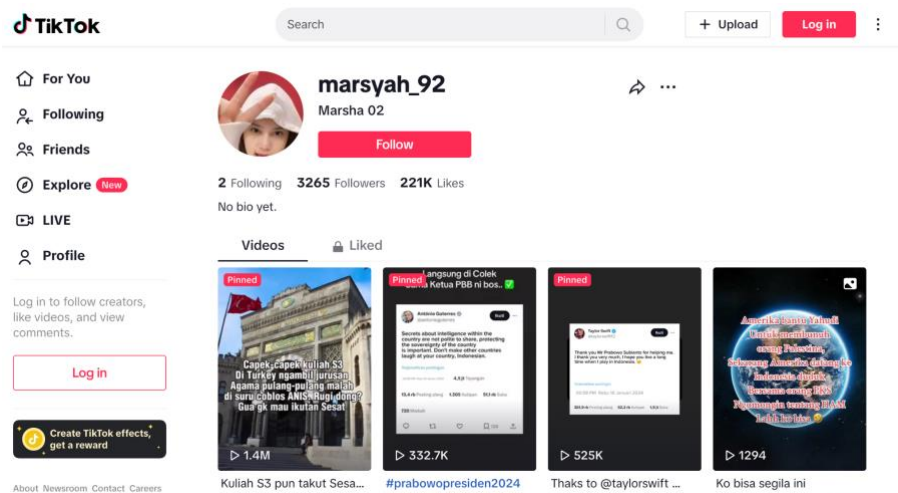
²³ <https://www.straitstimes.com/multimedia/graphics/2024/01/indonesia-election/index.html?shell>

²⁴ <https://time.com/6328273/indonesia-presidential-election-2024-contenders/>

²⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/09/indonesia-election-prabowo-subianto-rebranding-kidnapping-accusations>

²⁶ <https://www.economist.com/asia/2024/02/01/tiktok-is-a-key-battleground-in-indonesias-election>

January 2024²⁷ and 7 February 2024, and was taken down following a viral Tweet that sounded alarm about the hoax.²⁸ Before it disappeared from TikTok the video had racked up over half a million views. [[Link to TikTok profile with the video here](#)]



Screenshot of TikTok profile, which shared a video of a social media post by Taylor Swift purportedly thanking Subianto is third from the right. Copyright: Digital Action

“Based on this case alone, it’s the younger generation that is becoming prone to misinformation and/or disinformation instead of the older generation. Voters of a particular presidential candidate are easily swayed by this “clickbait-y” content that even if there are other users (in this case, users in the X platform) who provide substantial information that is fact-checked, they are not willing to review them,” Herdiani said.

TikTok has reportedly been working with Indonesia’s elections oversight body to stop the spread of falsehoods.²⁹ While officially TikTok doesn’t allow political ads on its platform, before the 2022 US midterm elections it had approved 90% of ads containing false information about voting, submitted by the rights watchdog Global Witness.³⁰

Disinformation in minority languages

²⁷ <https://turnbackhoax-id.translate.goog/2024/01/31/salah-cuitan-taylor-swift-di-x-berterima-kasih-kepada-prabowo-subianto/? x tr sl=id& x tr tl=en& x tr hl=en-US& x tr pto=wapp>

²⁸ <https://twitter.com/goldrush503/status/1754687534939156872?s=46&t=g3kEm-Dc3Q2cpfL8qojeaw>

²⁹ <https://www.economist.com/asia/2024/02/01/tiktok-is-a-key-battleground-in-indonesias-election>

³⁰ <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/21/tech/facebook-tiktok-misinfo-ads/index.html>

Like elsewhere in the world, in Indonesia's elections minority languages are also proving a stumbling block for social media platforms and could have real-world consequences, experts warn.

"I can see an increase in hate speech and misinformation related to the election, especially in local dialects on social media platforms like Facebook groups, TikTok, X, and YouTube. Like in the previous election, propaganda, including hate speech and misinformation, may influence public opinion and political behaviours, including voting," said Nuurrianti Jalli of Oklahoma State University. *"Tech companies have implemented various efforts, but there is still room for improvement, particularly in dealing with regional languages and social contexts. Collaboration with local/regional experts during the election could help significantly."*

Transparency disclosures by Big Tech companies in the European Union and Australia have shown that social media platforms have been chronically under-resourcing content moderation in local languages as compared with the English language.^{31,32} For example, only 8% of X/Twitter's content moderators are proficient in an official EU language other than English.³³ While at YouTube only 11% of EU language moderators were reviewing posts that weren't in English.³⁴

Other Indonesia experts were more critical, saying that Big Tech companies simply aren't ready to safeguard the democratic and information integrity of the February ballots, partly because of the companies' precarious relationship with the authorities. *"[T]his election cycle is actually worse than the last cycle - platforms are not set up to handle problems, and they are not being responsive and proactive enough. And that's a very dangerous sign,"* Raman Jit Singh Chima, Asia policy director at advocacy group Access Now reportedly said about Big Tech platforms in Indonesia, India and Bangladesh.³⁵

³¹ <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/digital-threats/how-big-tech-platforms-are-neglecting-their-non-english-language-users/>

³² <https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-10/Full-transparency-report-October-2023.pdf>

³³ <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/digital-threats/how-big-tech-platforms-are-neglecting-their-non-english-language-users/>

³⁴ <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/digital-threats/how-big-tech-platforms-are-neglecting-their-non-english-language-users/>

³⁵ <https://www.context.news/ai/deepfakes-deceive-voters-from-india-to-indonesia-before-elections>