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Cyber Terror, the Academic Anti-corruption Movement and Indonesian Democratic Regression

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This article examines a series of cyber terror attacks in 2019 on academics who protested the bill revising Law No. 30/2002, also known as the Corruption Eradication Commission (Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi, or KPK) Law. Recent research has highlighted a shrinking civic space as one prominent sign of Indonesia's democratic regression. However, how and to what extent this shrinking has occurred in the digital public sphere is still not well understood. Based on interviews with 16 academics who were members of the movement and who were subjected

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to cyber attacks, this article suggests that this amounts to "cyber terrorism". These attacks caused significant psychological distress to the academics involved and damaged the communications and coordination capacities of the movement, ultimately weakening it. This study argues that corrupt oligarchic elites were behind this "cyber terror" campaign, given the sophisticated nature of the cyber attacks and the intended goal of suppressing the academic anti-corruption movement. These elites would benefit from a weakened KPK as it would no longer be able to effectively investigate corruption allegations involving some of its members. These findings reinforce the latest studies on Indonesia's democratic regression.

Keywords: cyber terror, anti-corruption movement, civic space, democratic regression, Indonesian politics.

As the world's third-largest democracy, Indonesia has been touted as a role model for democratization.[1] However, much of the recent literature suggests that Indonesia's democratic gains have been gradually reversed, a situation which has been variously described in terms of "democratic setbacks",[2] "democratic regression",[3] "democratic deconsolidation",[4] "democratic decline",[5] "democratic backsliding",[6] "democratic recession"[7] and the "recession of democracy".[8] Eve Warburton and Thomas Power define democratic decline as a slow process characterized by a situation in which political actors slowly turn away from democratic values and institutions.[9] Although this decline does not always lead to authoritarianism, democratic decline can lead to mixed political regimes that are neither fully democratic nor fully dictatorial, such as illiberal democracies or competitive authoritarian systems. Two of the most important indicators of the decline of Indonesian democracy are the narrowing of the public space and the ongoing erosion of civil liberties.[10]

In the first 15 years following *reformasi*, from 1998 to 2013, Indonesian democracy showed substantial progress in areas such as freedom of expression and association, freedom of the press, and political rights and participation. However, the US-based democracy watchdog Freedom House started to warn of Indonesia's democratic backsliding in 2014, downgrading the country from "Free" to "Partly Free".[11] In 2019, it dropped Indonesia's freedom score from 62 to 61 due to the increased curtailment of civil liberties and political rights.[12]

The relationship between the Internet and democracy is not static, but influenced by social and political contexts. Just as a

thoroughly liberal and ideal democracy must be understood as an ongoing process, Internet freedom in Indonesia is also dynamic. Not long ago, the Internet and digital media were powerful tools for activism and mass mobilization.[13] In Indonesia, some researchers have also examined the role of digital media in political activism and participation.[14] In many cases, digital activism has also provided a means for citizens to articulate their voices. Moreover, citizens do not only access information resources through digital media, but they are also able to mobilize information and society to support their activism. Examples of online activism campaigns that targeted the government include Kawal Pemilu,[15] and the For Bali Movement.[16] However, more recently, the Internet has been harnessed as a medium to suppress social activism. While several studies have explained the link between cyber attacks and repression in Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand,[17] Myanmar[18] and Malaysia,[19] no studies have explicitly focused on the strategy of using "cyber terror" to further narrow the digital public space and weaken civil society movements. This article analyses how "cyber terror" attacks significantly weakened an academic anti-corruption movement in Indonesia. It relies on in-depth interviews with 16 anti-corruption activists who were members of a national academic movement that campaigned against the bill to revise Law No. 30/2002 in 2019, which would have weakened the Corruption Eradication Commission (*Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi*, or KPK). It is supplemented by digital ethnography conducted by the article's first and third authors, who observed the online discourse over the revisions to the KPK Law.

The academic anti-corruption movement emerged after the legislative lower house, the People's Representative Council of the Republic of Indonesia (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia*, or DPR), sought to pass revisions to the KPK Law in 2019. At its peak, the movement consisted of 2,594 lecturers at 41 universities in 22 out of the country's 34 provinces. In their role as activists, the academics were essential in sustaining the broader, popular anti-corruption movement in 2019, especially after the police killed two student protesters in the city of Kendari.[20] The academic movement proved to be an obstacle for corrupt political actors who were seeking to weaken the KPK. In this regard, the ensuing cyber terror campaign can be considered a reflection of two fundamental problems within the contemporary Indonesian political system: the increasingly corrupt practices of Indonesian

politicians on the one hand, and the growing political repression of dissent on the other.

Aside from the introduction and conclusion, our main analysis is presented in five sections. The first outlines the core concept of "cyber terror". The second provides context for the cyber terror attacks perpetrated against civil society activists in Indonesia. The third explains the rise of the academic anti-corruption movement and its underlying motivations. The fourth focuses on the emergence of cyber terror as a response to the academic alliance, its modus operandi, its psychological impact on the academics targeted, and its eventual impact on the movement itself. The final section explains the underlying political interests behind the cyber terror attacks and identifies the kind of groups that conduct these attacks.

What is Cyber Terror and How Does it Affect its Targets?

The concept of "cyber terror" has been developed over more than a decade. Initially the term referred to the traditional terror attacks carried out on crucial technological infrastructure to create extreme adverse effects, such as manipulating food and drug manufacturing, sabotaging power plants to create explosions or interfering with air traffic control.[21] However, more recently, some academics have broadened the definition to include digital attacks in the pursuit of certain social and political goals that leaves a detrimental psychological impact on their targets.[22]

This evolving notion of cyber terror attacks emphasizes the political and/or ideological motivations underlying the attacks, and the intention to provoke fear and intimidate their targets.[23] As Gabriel Weimann argues, cyber terror attacks must include "a 'terrorist' component", in the sense that the "attacks must instill terror as commonly understood (that is, result in death and/or large-scale destruction)" and "have a political motivation".[24] Myriam Dunn Cavelty echoed these themes in defining cyber terror as "cyber-incidents … mounted by sub-national terrorist groups … aimed at parts of the information infrastructure, instill terror by effects that are sufficiently destructive or disruptive to generate fear, and must have a political, religious, or ideological motivation".[25]

More importantly, Eric Luiijf argues for an expansive understanding of cyber terrorism, identifying it in terms of any "deliberate act or threat with illegal actions — either by a single person or in conspiracy — against the integrity, confidentiality and/

or availability of information, and of information processing systems and networks" resulting in:

> one or more of the following consequences: suffering, serious injuries, or death of people; serious psychological effects to people and the population; serious, societal disruptive economic loss; serious breach of ecological safety; serious breach of the social and political stability and cohesion.[26]

For Luiijf, a digital attack can be considered as "cyber terror" if it inflicts serious psychological effects on the population or harms socio-political stability and cohesion, even if no one was killed. This study follows Luiijf's definition when identifying cyber terror attacks and explaining how they have been perpetrated against Indonesian academics.[27] In addition, it also subscribes to the aforementioned literature in viewing cyber terror as digital attacks which carry a political agenda.

Cyber Terror and the Narrowing of Digital Public Space in Indonesia

The study of cyber terror attacks against anti-corruption activists from academia in the KPK case is crucial in the context of the narrowing of digital public space in Indonesia. Though the Internet was initially heralded as an effective platform for civil society to advance civil and political rights, there has been a narrowing of the digital space in Indonesia in recent years. Four developments have contributed to this outcome.

The first is the criminalization of online activism and criticism of the government under the Information and Electronic Transactions (ITE) Law, which was enacted in 2008. The Indonesian advocacy organization SAFEnet has noted that 287 criminal cases have been brought against citizens, journalists and activists under the law between 2008 and 2019, with 24 cases in 2019 alone.[28]

The second is the government's decision to suspend Internet access in the name of security in 2019. The first suspension was in the aftermath of the May 2019 presidential elections. From 22 to 24 May, the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (KOMINFO) blocked online connectivity to prevent the spread of fake news and avoid unrest, following civil protests against the election results.[29] However, even though the demonstrations mainly occurred in Jakarta, the suspension was implemented across Indonesia. The second suspension occurred in August 2019 in Papua and West

Papua, on the pretext of reducing the then-escalating separatist tensions in those provinces. A month later, another Internet block was imposed in the Papuan cities of Wamena and Jayapura from 23 to 29 September in a move to stem the spread of hoaxes and civil unrest.[30]

The third is online censorship in the form of government-mandated closures of certain websites without legal due process. Soon after KOMINFO promulgated this policy in early 2019, thousands of sites deemed to contain pirated material were closed.[31] Previously, the government had also closed dozens of websites that were considered to contain provocative or radical content.[32] Unfortunately, these website closures were undertaken in a non-transparent manner, and in the absence of any judicial or legal mechanisms to properly determine whether the websites deserved to be closed down. Moreover, websites critical of the government were often targeted for closure, while pro-government sites were generally left alone.[33]

The fourth is the cyber terror attacks of various kinds perpetrated against pro-democracy activists, which includes the hacking and surveillance of e-mails and WhatsApp accounts. There are two notable cyber terror campaigns that have captured public attention in Indonesia. The first, and thus far largest, cyber terror campaign was the one conducted against members of the academic anti-corruption alliance who were pushing back against the revision of the KPK Law, and the subject of this article. The second involved activist Ravio Patra, who was subjected to cyber attacks in April 2020. Ravio is the Indonesian on the Steering Committee of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a transcontinental initiative aimed at promoting government transparency. After criticizing the Special Staffer to President Joko Widodo (Jokowi), Billy Mambrasar, for an alleged conflict of interests in government projects in Papua,[34] Ravio's WhatsApp account was hacked and used to spread text messages inciting the public to violence.[35]

Cyber terror attacks have also been carried out against other targets. For example, in June 2020, students at the Gajah Mada University (UGM), who had planned to participate in discussions regarding legal governance and presidential impeachment,[36] received death threats by telephone.[37] When the chief editor of the online newspaper *Koran Tempo* interviewed the UGM activists about the threats, the editor's Instagram account was hacked.[38] In addition, on 22 August 2020, the Twitter account of an epidemiologist who

had been critical of the government's policy to contain the spread of COVID-19 was hacked by an unknown party.[39] Online media site *Tirto.id* was also hacked in August 2020, and five of its articles were erased.[40]

The Indonesian police did not investigate any of these hacking cases. The slow pace of the police investigations reflects the government's indifference, or even tolerance, of these cyber terror attacks. Even President Jokowi did not condemn the hacking cases, casually mentioning instead during an interview that the perpetrators were very smart young Indonesians.[41] From these cases, we can see that cyber terror attacks against activists are a symptom of the narrowing of the digital public space in Indonesia. As the cyber terror attack against the academic anti-corruption movement was one of the largest, it deserves to be analysed in depth.

The Rise of the Academic Movement against the Revision of the KPK Law

The revision of the KPK Law provoked a lot of opposition because of the crucial role the KPK has played in trying to eliminate corruption and establishing the rule of law in Indonesia since its creation in 2003.[42] The KPK has pursued high-profile anti-graft cases involving powerful citizens or political elites, which meant that the commission posed a direct threat to some members of the top strata of Indonesian society who have abused their powers.[43]

As a result, there have been frequent attempts to undermine the KPK throughout its existence.[44] These efforts, generally directed at its commissioners through various lawsuits, had previously been blocked by civil society movements, including the "Save KPK" campaigns of 2012 and 2015. However, the revisions of the KPK Law in 2019 took a different tack, creating instead a supervisory council to oversee the agency that would be appointed by the president—possibly weakening the KPK's oversight of the executive branch. Additionally, the revised law introduced a requirement for the KPK to obtain permission from the supervisory board before conducting wiretapping operations, which meant that the board could hamper, or at least slow down, the KPK's investigative capacities.

The passage of the revision to the KPK Law was also alarming, occurring in the midst of the transition to the newly-elected slate of legislators following the 2019 presidential and legislative elections.

The bill was introduced in the DPR on 5 September 2019, when the outgoing parliament was still seated. Many observers were shocked when the DPR only held a 20-minute debate before agreeing to pass the revisions.[45] Some anti-corruption activists responded by cynically observing that though the "DPR has never worked. Once it works, it [becomes] troublesome for many people."[46]

In response to the changes and hasty passage of the revised KPK Law, protests quickly broke out. The first objection came from the KPK itself. The commission, which was not consulted about the changes, firmly rejected the revisions. The then-chief of the KPK, Agus Rahardjo, released a press statement on 5 September 2019 asserting that the KPK's existence was on the line.[47] In the same statement, the KPK expressed hopes that President Jokowi would reject the draft bill, but the latter did not respond. On 6 September, hundreds of KPK employees gathered in front of the agency's building dressed in black to symbolize their mourning over the death of the anti-corruption agency.[48] Meanwhile, KPK commissioners also wrote to President Jokowi, warning him not to persist with the efforts to weaken the KPK through legislative changes.[49]

The revision of the KPK Law also triggered the public to act. On 6 September, an online petition was organized and ultimately collected 520,000 signatures.[50] In addition to the petition, a national academic anti-corruption alliance opposed to the changes to the KPK Law was convened. This movement was supported by academics all over the country and grew quickly, resulting in a much stronger impact than the public petition. The academics, despite being based at different universities across the country, were able to use the messaging platform WhatsApp to communicate, coordinate and expand their membership.

Central to the organizing efforts of this academic anti-corruption network was a WhatsApp group chat consisting of coordinators who represented thousands of other academic supporters at their respective universities. Through the WhatsApp group chat, the coordinators provided regular updates regarding the number of signatories from their institutions, which were then shared with the media. These leading actors organized actions and created petitions on their respective campuses. At its peak, the academic movement encompassed at least 2,594 lecturers from 41 universities in 22 provinces. However, the growing influence of this political movement triggered a counterattack in the form of cyber terrorism, which will be explained in the next section.

Cyber Terror Attacks against the Academic Anti-corruption Movement

The target of the first cyber attack was an academic who was one of the movement's coordinators and an administrator of the movement's group chat. The group chat was disbanded after the attack. This hack was first noticed when the coordinator, a vocal opponent to the revision of the KPK Law, suddenly sent a strange personal message individually to the members of the chat group. As can be seen in Figure 1, the coordinator appeared to now be in support of the revision:

> Urgent! KPK is now without supervision. It can [be] directed by certain people. Let's support the revision of [the KPK Law] for a stronger and more transparent KPK!

Figure 1
The Hoax Message Sent from the WhatsApp Account of One of the Academic Movement's Coordinators

Source: Digital ethnography provided by one of the authors (September 2019).

One of the authors of this article communicated with several academic colleagues who were members of the movement and who had also received the same message from the coordinator. Later,

all members of the WhatsApp group said they had been sent the same message. In the group chat, members discussed whether the coordinator's phone number had been hacked. The coordinator later confirmed that his mobile phone had indeed been hacked and that he would not use that number again. The coordinator created a new group chat using a different mobile phone number and invited all members of the previous group to join it. However, subsequent cyber attacks occurred, affecting almost all members of the chat group. Dozens of academics experienced such calls from unknown numbers, raising concerns that this would escalate into a hacking attack against them. Due to the public profiles of these lecturers, the incident was reported in the news.[51]

As Luijjf states, one of the characteristics of cyber terror is its impact in terms of one or more of the following: suffering, injury, death, severe psychological impacts on a person or group, large economic losses, environmental damage, or disruption to social and political stability.[52] At least three of these impacts were present in this case: a psychological impact on the academics, i.e. fear; a negative impact on the coordination, communication and consolidation of the academic movement; and a negative impact on civil liberties and democracy in general. This digital attack can therefore be considered cyber terrorism.

The Psychological Impact of the Terror Attack

Cyber terror attacks can have a psychological impact on their targets, and this was experienced by the academics who participated in the research for this article. In interviews, they reported feeling afraid that their mobile phones would be tapped and their personal data would be used, for example, to hack their bank accounts. One academic reported that:

> Well, what we pay attention to is our safety and the issue of bank transfer security … For example, I realized that if I still used this number, maybe later I could get hacked when I made a bank transfer from my mobile phone… so I become more alert.[53]

Another fear was that their phone numbers could be hacked and then misused, which might endanger their families, friends and colleagues:

> The terror attack had reached my family as my wife received terror threats. And … my family and I were in the position of having to make the LPSK [Institute for the Protection of Witnesses and

> Victims] report, as we officially reported the attacks as they were occurring too often. Until the LPSK ordered us to report to the departmental police, well, we don't think we can really count on the the police. So, we protected ourselves.[54]
>
> Some people received calls from a different country and then [someone] hacked into their social media accounts. That is why people … became worried about their safety or … their family's safety. Because some people rang their telephone at home and terrorized their families … it is clear that this is terror because the goal is to make us retreat.[55]

Another fear was that a target's cell phone number might be misused to publicly embarrass its owner, as mentioned in the following quote:

> A phenomenon … becomes a trend, and then maybe it can develop … into something I call … terrorism at the social media level. Terrorism in this context is doxxing, like you know they take our online picture and put it somewhere in different context... and this is very terrible to me. Being humiliated in public, whether the content is true or not … has a destructive effect … the person concerned finds it challenging to clarify.[56]

Moreover, some of the lecturers were afraid not only when carrying out activities in cyberspace, but also in their offline lives. One lecturer revealed that since the terror attacks on social media, they suspected they had come under surveillance:

> There was a black car that kept stopping in front of the house. I did not recognize the car, but I was suspicious because it was not usually there.[57]

All the informants confirmed that the cyber terror attacks created fear in both their online and offline lives, highlighting the deep psychological impacts of these attacks.

Hindering Communication, Destroying Coordination and Weakening the Movement

As explained in the previous section, the anti-corruption movement was able to grow because the academics were able to easily communicate and coordinate with one another through the WhatsApp group chat. When members of the group chat were repeatedly hacked and targeted with nuisance phone calls, it disrupted communication among the academic-activists as well as their ability to coordinate action. For instance, an informant described how digital organizing efforts through WhatsApp was affected:

> During that time, the terror was … constant, and some calls did interfere with my communication, I also got disturbed as I kept getting phone calls. We did not use phones in the end, just … WhatsApp; we could not answer any calls because we were afraid, and we were reminded not to pick up because if we answered, then our numbers could be taken over and used remotely … that was scary, too.[58]

The persistent nuisance calls forced the academics to stop using their mobile phones, depriving them of a key tool for communicating and coordinating with their fellow activists. Furthermore, the academics became more cautious about the content of their communications. For instance, they avoided naming specific officials whom they suspected were working to weaken the KPK, out of fear that their words would be used as evidence of defamation or other legal offenses. An informant suggested that:

> ... the atmosphere [in the WhatsApp chat group] ... psychologically was different as it was not only about fear. However, maybe I was already ... suspicious. Communication was not as straightforward as before.[59]

The academics were worried that some unknown person or group had gained access to their mobile phones and that their conversations were being monitored.

The cyber terror attacks created panic among the members of the group chat. Figure 2 shows a screen capture of the mobile phone of an academic who received a barrage of calls from unknown numbers. In one of the authors' experience, when an academic answered these nuisance calls, there would not be a speaker on the other end. The calls were made repeatedly throughout the day, compelling some of the academics to switch off their phones. As a result, one by one, the academics decided to leave the chat group for security reasons. Figure 3 shows how a member asking for "permission to leave the group", which was followed by another person stating that "I was also hacked; I would like to leave the group".

The cyber terror attacks involving phone hacking and nuisance calls not only psychologically affected academics individually, but also significantly damaged the movement's ability to mobilize. The breakdown in communication and coordination weakened the movement. This was visible in the reduced number of academics who were involved in the movement after the first cyber terror attack against the WhatsApp chat group. Some of the academics had formed a new group on Telegram (which was considered

more secure), but not as many joined as before. Two informants reported that:

> We were forced to switch to other social media platforms, but there were fewer members there ... and people were no longer as motivated as when we were in the WhatsApp groups.[60]
>
> But there were others ... who were even more scared, too. I could not help ... they became afraid because of this cyber terror. We should move to another platform with a few members, install it, and not use this platform.[61]

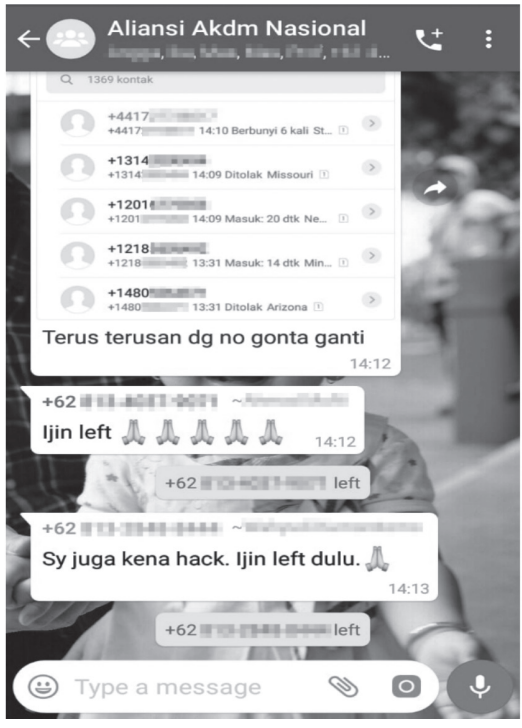
In other words, the cyber terror attacks generated fear and concern among the members of the group chat, compelling many to leave the movement, despite the efforts to avoid these attacks such as shifting the group chat to alternative messaging platforms.

The terror attacks also weakened the movement's capacity for advocacy, especially in conveying information to the media. The academics, in addition to gathering signatories for their petitions, were also involved in media outreach to influence public opinion,

Figure 2
Screen Capture of the Academic Movement's WhatsApp Group Chat During a Cyber Attack

Source: Digital ethnography provided by one of the authors (September 2019).

Figure 3
Screen Capture of the Academic Movement's WhatsApp Group Chat as Members Sought to Leave due to the Cyber Terror Attacks



Source: Digital ethnography provided by one of the authors (September 2019).

with journalists to advocate for the movement, influencing public opinion. Networking with journalists was thus vital to advance the movement's anti-corruption cause. One member of the movement, who was also the leader of an anti-corruption civil society organization, stated that:

> It became a bit more difficult to communicate with the media … For example, Thursday's press conference [was from] 9 am to 12 pm, [but] during that time, the calls did not stop.[62]

The informant stated that the repeated nuisance calls prevented them from using their telephones to contact journalists. News coverage had previously enabled the movement to connect with the public. Without continued coverage, the movement' outreach became more limited, thereby reducing its impact.

Terror, Oligarchy and Democracy Deficit

Who was behind these cyber terror attacks? There is clearly a powerful group that wanted the revisions to the KPK Law to pass in order to weaken the commission's role and authority, and hence did not want the academic anti-corruption movement to succeed. Thus, those responsible for the cyber attacks against the academics shared the same interests of both the DPR representatives and the executive government.

In the DPR, there were five legislative factions that proposed the revisions to the KPK Law: the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP); the United Development Party (PPP); the National Awakening Party (PKB); the Golkar Party; and the National Democratic Party (Nasdem). However, in practice, all of the political parties in the DPR that supported either the Joko Widodo-Ma'ruf Amin or the Prabowo Subianto-Sandiaga Uno presidential slates in the 2019 elections were in agreement about revising the KPK Law.[63] None of the parties rejected the proposed revisions. The government, therefore, approved the revisions initiated by the DPR by issuing a presidential letter, sent by President Jokowi to the Minister of Law and Human Rights, Yasonna Laoly.

Why did all of the political parties represented in parliament rush to pass these revisions? The answer is that the KPK has previously arrested corrupt politicians from most of those parties. Data from Indonesian Corruption Watch (ICW) shows that 23 members of the DPR had been named as suspects in anti-corruption investigations by the KPK between 2014 and 2019.[64] The parties with the most members arrested were, in decreasing order: the Golkar Party (eight members); the PDIP (three members); the National Mandate Party (three members); the Democratic Party (three members); the People's Conscience Party (two members); the PKB (one member); the PPP (one member); Nasdem (one member); and the Prosperous Justice Party (one member).[65]

One of the main causes of political corruption is the rising cost of elections, partly due to the practice of vote-buying.[66] The increasing cost of participating in the Indonesian electoral process has contributed to "the rise of clientelism",[67] as politicians must seek funding from powerful and rich business people to campaign and win votes. Once elected, the politicians are expected to craft policies that are conducive to their sponsors' predatory business interests. It is thus not surprising that KPK operations to arrest corrupt politicians were most frequent in the periods leading up to

general or regional elections.[68] As politicians and business people inevitably became further aligned in this cycle of corruption, they came to recognize the threat of a strong and empowered KPK. The various political parties therefore have a shared interest in weakening the KPK.

President Jokowi also supported the revisions to the KPK Law, demonstrated by several of his decisions. First, the Indonesian legal system provides the president with a period of 30 days to either reject or approve the DPR's plenary decision to ratify the revision of the KPK Law. If the president fails to either approve or reject the revision within that period, the bill automatically takes effect. Jokowi allowed the 30 days to pass without taking any decision.

Second, after the revised KPK Law took effect, the President had the authority to issue a Government Regulation in Lieu of Law (or PERPPU) to cancel the law. The option to issue a PERPPU was directly pointed out to Jokowi by intellectuals during a meeting at the state palace, which the President himself had initiated with the aim of understanding public opinion. However, Jokowi chose not to take any action, allowing instead for the Constitutional Court to decide whether the revised law was constitutional. The President's chief of staff, Moeldoko, directed the public to submit their protests to the Constitutional Court.[69]

Third, Jokowi's response to the proposed revisions were lacklustre compared to his predecessor, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. In 2012, during Yudhoyono's second term in office, the DPR and the government sought to include a revised KPK Law in the national legislative programme plan's (Prolegnas) priority list, with Commission III on law, human rights and security tasked with formulating a draft bill to revise the KPK Law. However, the revision effort immediately drew criticism as the draft compiled by the commission appeared to weaken the KPK, including removing the KPK's prosecution authority and its ability to conduct wiretaps.[70] Yudhoyono eventually rejected these revisions, even though his Democratic Party in the DPR had previously supported the changes. Conveying his decision, President Yudhoyono stated the "thought and plan to revise the KPK Law, as long as it is to strengthen and not weaken the KPK, is actually possible. However, I don't think it's appropriate to do this at this time."[71] This experience of revising the KPK Law proved arduous enough that all parties in the DPR agreed to drop the issue. No further attempt to revise the KPK law was made until after Jokowi was re-elected to a second term in 2019.

In this regard, we argue that there are at least three underlying reasons why Jokowi approved the revisions to the KPK Law. First, as suggested by Warburton, Jokowi adheres to a kind of developmentalism ideology that prioritizes infrastructure development above all else,[72] including corruption eradication.[73] Second, to realize his development goals, he needed the support of members of the DPR and ministers from political parties who supported the revisions. Third, he appears to have been aware that some of the infrastructure projects may have violated rules and procedures which in the future could be categorized as misconduct. For example, the Job Creation Act in 2020 was later declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court.[74]

In other words, as a politician, Jokowi seems to realize that he himself cannot be completely free from the informality trap coloured by clientelistic relationships that characterizes Indonesian politics.[75] Therefore, just like members of the DPR, Jokowi also has a mutual interest in weakening the KPK in order to ensure that this anti-corruption body is no longer able to work effectively in dealing with future corruption cases which might involve any politicians, including those who belong to his own political circle.

It is therefore not surprising that our informants revealed their suspicions that certain members of the government were involved in the process of revising the law:

> Well, my friends and I think that this is not a private actor. Or at least if it is a private actor, it is people who have connections with the authorities ... Now it is also difficult to say that there is no direct or indirect state intervention in terror.[76]

Another informant argued that the actors behind the attacks must have significant resources considering the sophisticated wiretapping devices used. These devices are expensive and cannot be purchased easily by members of the public. One informant argued that the "wiretapping was almost certainly carried out by a very structured force as it was an extensive logistical operation".[77]

This supports the theory that the cyber terror attacks were carried out by certain actors interested in weakening the KPK—that is, actors with the same interests as both the DPR and the government, which supported the revision to the KPK Law. The academic-activists of the anti-corruption movement are therefore of the opinion that the perpetrators of the cyber terror attacks against them are power holders, or a combination of power holders, such as the political elite, parliament and the president, or groups close

to them as well as corrupt business elite possessing huge amount of economic power making them capable of financing the terror.

The cyber terror campaign affirms the presence in Indonesia of predatory oligarchic forces consisting of corrupt politicians as well as corrupt business people who are interested in weakening civil society and hijacking democracy to accumulate wealth and preserve their power.[78] In that regard, our findings are in line with recent studies that have identified the role played by oligarchs in digital repression. One report has revealed how cyber troops consisting of political buzzers and social media influencers have been deployed to manipulate public opinion towards supporting the revision of the KPK Law,[79] while another suggests governments, business people and politicians are funding the operations of these "cyber troops" in order to suppress public protest. Given the enormous cost of buying and managing "cyber troops" and its social media propaganda operation, the purchaser is an oligarchic elite with significant political and economic power.[80]

This study also corroborates the claims that Indonesia's democratic decline is due to both structural and agential factors. The structural factors include the formation of an increasingly powerful oligarchy and the increasing political repression that weakened civil society, while the element of agency can be found in the weak democratic commitment on the parts of Indonesia's democratically-elected president.[81] As argued by Richard Robison and Vedi Hadiz,[82] while Suharto's New Order collapsed in 1998, the oligarchic power that formed during the regime remained intact. In other words, structurally speaking, Indonesian politics is still very much the same now as it was then. However, despite the similar structural context, Indonesia did not experience extreme democratic decline until Jokowi came to power, with the weakening of the KPK being a significant indicator of that decline. This is because President Jokowi has shown relatively less commitment to democracy compared to, for instance, his predecessor Yudhoyono, who ultimately did not back the attempt to weaken the KPK.

Conclusion

This article examines the cyber terror attacks perpetrated against an academic movement in 2019 that was formed to oppose the bill revising the KPK Law, which would have weakened the anti-corruption commission and the broader effort to eradicate graft in Indonesia. The movement was very influential, quickly receiving widespread

support from academics across multiple Indonesian universities due to its use of digital media, especially WhatsApp group chats. However, this movement was quickly suppressed through cyber terror attacks directed at the academics, which included the hacking of their WhatsApp accounts, incessant nuisance phone calls from multiple foreign-registered numbers and the hacking of academics' social media accounts. These attacks caused the participating academics considerable psychological distress, hindered the group's ability to coordinate and communicate, which ultimately resulted in the breakdown of the movement. We argue that the forces behind the cyber terror campaign were corrupt oligarchic elites who had a strong interest in weakening the KPK. This study therefore contributes to the discussion of democratic decline in Indonesia by identifying a new method of digital repression.

NOTES

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