

# Affective Polarization on Indonesia Twittersphere: Natural or Polluted by Cyber Troops?

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## Abstract

Affective Polarization is a disliking towards out-groups and liking towards in-groups. Scholars studying affective polarization in the online context focus on the impact of social media on affective polarization, or vice versa. There are still few scholars discussing the background or identity of social media users engaged in affectively polarized discussions. Twitter is a confirmed platform for affective polarization, and we observed a case phenomenon in hashtags that depict affective polarization in Indonesian Twitter, specifically in the hashtags #SBYBapakhoax and #TerimakasihPakSBY. Abnormal activity in both hashtags, such as the rapid rise and trending status, prompted us to investigate whether the affective polarization in these hashtags occurred naturally or not. Using content and network analysis on N=8956 posts and 675 accounts on #SBYBapakHoax, and N=11,242 posts and 702 accounts on #TerimakasihPakSBY, we found that affective polarization in both hashtags did not occur naturally and was polluted by the presence of cyber troops. The findings of this study contribute to complementing previous studies on affective polarization in the online context. This is also valuable for voters who use social media, especially Twitter, as one of their political preferences, to identify the presence of cyber troop characteristics in a political conversation both before and during the general elections, so they are not influenced by the conflicts arising and can make informed political decisions.

**Keywords:** Polarization, politics, election, cyber troops, communication.

Political polarization on social media is not a singular phenomenon. Polarization varies significantly between platforms, and the unique characteristics of each platform influence the development of political polarization. Twitter is a social media platform confirmed to exhibit affective polarization (Yarchi et al., 2020). Affective polarization is highly prevalent in the Twittersphere between in-group and out-group (Mentzer et al., 2020). This polarization arises from a disliking of the opposing side and a liking for the in-group, known as affective polarization (Iyengar et al., 2019). Scholars discussing

affective polarization are divided into two groups: those who address affective polarization in the context of two parties and polarization in the context of multi-party systems, as well as affective polarization that occurs offline and online. There are still relatively few scholars examining affective polarization in the context of multi-party systems, as well as those studying affective polarization that occurs in online contexts.

Scholars who delve into polarization within the online context focus on the consequences of affective polarization on social media group

interactions (Wakefield & Wakefield, 2022), how digital media drives affective polarization through partisan sorting ((Tomberg, 2022), affective polarization in cross-sectoral communication, both online and offline (Nordbrandt, 2022), the impact of adversarial narratives in affectively polarized online discussions (Borrelli et al., 2022), affective polarization within feminist movements (Estrada & Juarez, 2022), the influence of elite discourse on affective polarization (Lorenzo-rodríguez & Torcal, 2022), the contribution of social media to affective polarization (Lee et al., 2021) and even the effects of incidental and selective online exposure on political emotions (Zhu et al., 2021), however, there are still relatively few scholars discussing the background or identity of social media users engaged in affectively polarized discussions on social media. Therefore, in this paper, we will address this by using case examples from Indonesian Twitter.

Polarization has become a persistent phenomenon in Indonesian politics between the years 2014 and 2020 (Jati, 2022). On the Indonesian Twitter platform, one form of affective polarization that has occurred is between pro-Jokowi and anti-Jokowi factions regarding Covid-19. Users with specific political preferences tend to accept information that aligns with their political choice, while disregarding information from other political parties. Furthermore, this polarization is reinforced through the use of hashtags (Ali & Eriyanto, 2021).

Hashtag wars are a part of social media campaigns involving various media and actors, primarily featuring negative content with the aim of attacking opponents. For instance, the clash between #2019gantipresiden and #Jokowi2Periode (Helmi et al., 2020). Hashtag wars have the potential to damage national unity, erode the essence of democracy, and prevent the public from receiving the information they should rightfully obtain (Fadillah et al., 2020). Concurrently presenting pro and contra stances in hashtag wars can influence political emotions

(Zhu et al., 2021). Interestingly, hashtag wars are also coordinated efforts to frame the social media audience (Chagas et al., 2022).

This caught our attention because we found that the affective polarization occurring in the hashtags #SBYBapakhoax versus #TerimakasihPakSBY exhibited characteristics of coordination, as these hashtags quickly trended on Twitter. Both of these hashtags emerged simultaneously on September 18, 2022, and conveyed sentiments of dislike towards #SBYBapakhoax, indicating a displeasure towards SBY, and gratitude towards #TerimakasihPakSBY, demonstrating fondness for SBY. This dislike was triggered by a speech by Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the chairman of the high council of the Democratic Party, where he mentioned the possibility of fraud in the upcoming 2024 elections, as well as information suggesting that the Democratic Party should not expect to have the opportunity to nominate candidates for president and vice president (Fikhasari, 2022).

The first hashtag to emerge was #SBYBapakhoax, followed by #TerimakasihPakSBY as a form of resistance against the #SBYBapakhoax hashtag. Both of these hashtags went viral and became trending topics on Twitter. The rapid virality of these hashtags is an intriguing phenomenon, as it reflects characteristics of "buzz" activity, which is characterized by intense activity in a short period of time (Deusser et al., 2018). Therefore, this phenomenon led us to the research question: Is the affective polarization occurring in the #SBYBapakHoax and #TerimakasihPakSBY hashtags a form of affective polarization influenced by Cyber Troops' activities? To address this, we will identify the users involved in the #SBYBapakHoax vs. #TerimakasihSBY hashtags. The findings of this study contribute to complementing research on affective polarization and social media. Additionally, this study will be valuable for social media users in recognizing the characteristics or traits of cyber

troops in political discussions that occur on social media, particularly on Twitter in Indonesia.

## Methods

This study uses Social Network Analysis (SNA) and Content Analysis. SNA is that method for describing, analyzing, and understanding social relationships (Steketee et al., 2015). SNA is frequently used to examine social media networks and their structures. It provides a set of metrics that can indicate the position/interest of each node in the network structure (Recuero et al., 2019). We opted for the eigenvector centrality metric to identify the most significant actors in the network of these two hashtags. We utilized the Gephi software for visualization and the label adjust algorithm for creating the graph. Additionally, we applied Content Analysis to identify the actors and the users connected to them. Content Analysis aims to produce research that is valid, rigorous, reliable, and replicable. This technique is used to examine information and content in written or symbolic language (Small, 2011). This method also enables the ability to facilitate the processing of large and diverse sets of data (for example, oral, written, or visual) found in available sources and collected from human participants (Selvi, 2019).

In this research, we conducted a case study focusing on a specific hashtag. The pound sign (#), known as a hashtag, serves a different function compared to RT and @. The purpose of a hashtag is to mark the topic of a tweet. It emphasizes a keyword in a tweet as metadata that refers to the message's topic specified by its use (Zappavigna, 2011). In this study, we chose to analyze the hashtags #SBYBapakHoax and #TerimakasihPakSBY. The following are the methodological steps employed in this research:

### 1. Data Collection

The data was collected from the social media platform Twitter on September 18, 2022, when the hashtags were trending topics. Data collection was performed using the Ncapture

software with the keywords #SBYBapakHoax and #TerimakasihPakSBY. The collected data amounted to N=13,144 for #SBYBapakHoax and N=16,316 for #TerimakasihPakSBY.

### 2. Data Filtering and Bot Measurement

The data is filtered using Nvivo software and converted into Excel to calculate the number of Tweets and Re-Tweets, resulting in the users with the highest number of Tweets and Re-Tweets. The filtered data is ready for processing, with N=8956 for #SBYBapakHoax and N=11,242 for #TerimakasihPakSBY. Bot measurement is conducted to check if the most active users in both Tweets and Re-Tweets are classified as bots. The software used for this is Botometer.

### 3. Social Network Analysis and Content Analysis

Social network analysis is conducted to identify the most significant actors in each hashtag and the distribution of users connected to these actors involved in both hashtags. Following this, we perform content analysis to categorize the users/accounts involved in both hashtags using the coding system we have created. There are 702 users/accounts for the hashtag #TerimakasihPakSBY and 675 users/accounts for the hashtag #SBYBapakHoax that we will identify.

The various challenges we encountered in the research process, such as our inability to fully rely on machines to analyze content that aligns with our research goals, required us to employ two methods: manual and automatic, to generate good quality data. Second, because the research data was not processed immediately after we finished collecting it, we faced the issue of encountering several user accounts that were either inactive or suspended by Twitter, which impacted our ability to analyze their content or measure the bot scores of those accounts. Third, we experienced limitations in gathering all the data because the software we used had limits for data retrieval. Therefore, we recommend that future research promptly processes the obtained

data and considers subscribing to the Twitter API to address these challenges.

## Results

The hashtag war between #SBYBapakHoax and #TerimakasihPakSBY revolves around SBY, which stands for Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a former president of the Republic of Indonesia for two terms from 2004-2009 and 2009-2014. He is also the Chairman of the High Council of the Democratic Party. This hashtag emerged after SBY delivered a speech that contained statements implying distrust in the government. The hashtag #SBYBapakHoax suggests that SBY is the father of hoaxes. In Indonesian, "hoax" means false news, fake information, or a fabricated story. This implies that SBYBapakHoax characterizes SBY as someone who spreads false news, fake information, or fabricated stories. This term carries a negative sentiment and indicates displeasure with what SBY conveyed. Shortly after this hashtag started trending, the hashtag #TerimakasihPakSBY, meaning "Thank you, Mr. SBY," emerged. It carries a positive sentiment, signifying gratitude towards SBY for the policies implemented during his tenure. Both hashtags reflect the sentiments of disapproval and approval towards SBY. This phenomenon illustrates the affective polarization occurring on Twitter, where users express either liking or disliking towards SBY. These hashtags quickly gained traction, raising questions about whether they are organic or polluted by cyber troops or buzzers.

Next, to ascertain whether these hashtags were tainted by the presence of cyber troops, we further examined the network distribution among users within both hashtags using Gephi software. The results can be seen in Figures 1 and 2 below.

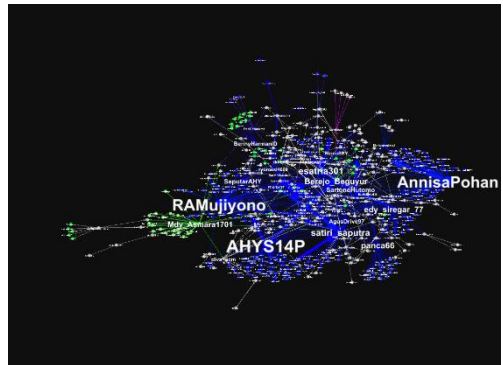


Figure 1. The Important actors in the #TerimakasihPakSBY network  
Source: Processed by the author

In Figure 1 above, we can see the key actors involved in #TerimakasihPakSBY. The blue color indicates a partisan of the Democratic Party, green indicates a supporter of Anies Baswedan, and purple indicates ordinary citizens. RAM Mujiono, AHY SI4P, and Annisa Pohan are partisan of the Democratic Party. Based on content analysis, RAM Mujiono is the official account of the chairman of the Jakarta Democratic Party and the chairman of Commission A of the Jakarta Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD). AHY SI4P is an account that provides information about Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono as the chairman of the Democratic Party, and Annisa Pohan's account represents the leader of the Democratic Women's Organization (Srikandi Demokrat). Additionally, in the figure, we can see an account with the name MdyAsmara701, which based on content analysis, the account is a supporter of Anies Baswedan. Why do supporters of Anies Baswedan also support this hashtag? This is because at the time of this research, Anies Baswedan was a presidential candidate supported by the Democratic Party and expected to be paired with Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono, who is the chairman of the Democratic Party, as the vice-presidential candidate for the 2024 General Elections. Furthermore, from the figure above, it can be seen that ordinary citizens also

participate in this hashtag. Next, we proceed to examine the user network in the #SBYBapakHoax hashtag. The results can be seen in Figure 8 below.

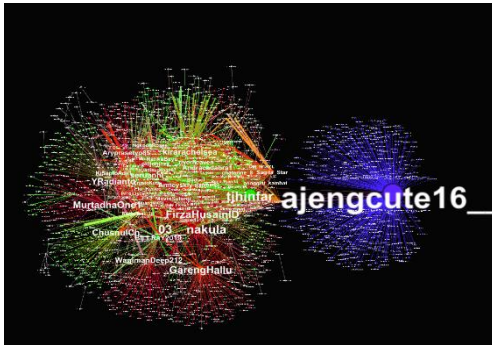


Figure 2. The Important actors in the #SBYBapakHoax network

Source: Processed by the author

The red color indicates a supporter of Jokowi/Ganjar, green indicates a specific characteristic buzzer, blue indicates Democratic Party partisans, supporters of Anies, and ordinary people, orange indicates suspended or non-existent accounts, and yellow indicates ordinary citizens. In the above image, we can see that #SBYBapakHoax is very intriguing because one of the key actors in this hashtag is an account named *ajengcute\_*. She is the head of the Department of Public Relations and Media at the Central Board of Women of the Democratic Party of the Republic of Indonesia. Our search and analysis indicate that this account uses the #SBYBapakHoax hashtag in her posts with the aim of countering the hashtag. This can be observed from the separation of her account's circle from the other circle. Furthermore, the larger circle on the left side consists of accounts that play significant roles such as *tjhinfar*, *firzahuseinID*, and *03\_nakula*. Based on content analysis, *tjhinfar* is an account that is part of GASRI (Garuda Siaga Republik Indonesia/Garuda Republic of Indonesia Alert), *firzahuseinID* is an account supporting Ganjar as president

and Erick Tohir as vice president, while *03\_nakula* is similar to *firzahuseinID*, supporting Ganjar as president and Erick Tohir as vice president.

The results of the analysis of important actor networks serve as the foundation for us to proceed with this study by analyzing the content from all user accounts involved in both hashtags. The outcomes of the content analysis for 702 users from #TerimakasihPakSBY and 677 users from #SBYBapakHoax can be seen in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1. The user categories involved in #TerimakasihPakSBY

Categories	Total
The Official Accounts of the Democratic Party at the Central and Regional Levels	42
Volunteers, friends, supporters, and information about AHY	22
Democratic Party members	210
Supporters of Anies Baswedan	105
Supporters of Jokowi, Ganjar, Prabowo	10
Supporters of Ganjar and Jokowi with specific characteristics (NKRI, GASRI, Boombers, Bhineka Tunggal Ika) / Cyber Troops	6
Ordinary citizens (Neutral/Not supporting anyone)	161
Suspended account	66
Account no longer exists	45
Account with protected tweets	10
Online news account	2
Newly created account when the hashtag emerged	16
Others	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>702</b>

Source: Processed by the author

From table 1 above, it can be observed that the user category that extensively uses #TerimakasihPakSBY is Democratic Party members. Democratic Party members, which include official accounts from the central and regional Democratic Party, DPC, and Bakomstra from various regions, as well as volunteers and supporters of the Democratic Party, all actively employ #TerimakasihPakSBY. This signifies that this hashtag represents an internal group (the Democratic Party) and serves as an expression of

favoritism towards this group. Furthermore, in the second position, this hashtag is also widely utilized by ordinary citizens. Interestingly, this hashtag is also supported by accounts backing presidential candidate Anies Baswedan. The support from Anies Baswedan's supporters is attributed to the fact that at the time when the hashtag emerged, Anies Baswedan was being touted as a presidential candidate who would be paired with the general chairman of the Democratic Party, Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono.

Table 2. The user categories involved in #SBYBapakHoax

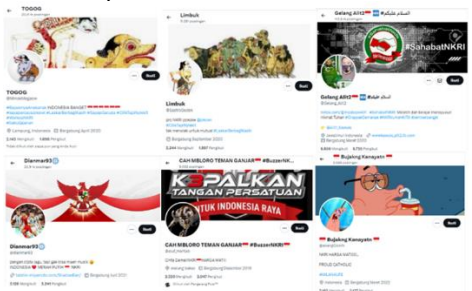
Categories	Total
Supporters of Jokowi	50
Supporters of Ganjar Pranowo	129
Supporters of Ganjar and Jokowi with specific characteristics (NKRI, GASRI, Boombers, Bhineka Tunggal Ika) / Cyber Troops	192
Supporters of Ganjar Pranowo-Erick Tohir	25
Supporters of Erick Tohir	14
Supporters of Gibran Rakabuming Raka	6
Supporters of Anies Baswedan	17
Anies Baswedan's detractors	3
Ordinary citizens (Neutral/Not supporting anyone)	77
Suspended account	83
Account no longer exists	62
Account with protected tweets	4
Newly created account when the hashtag emerged	4
Online news account	3
Others	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>675</b>

Source: Processed by the author

From table 2 above, it can be seen that the hashtag #SBYBapakHoax is a hashtag filled with specific characteristic cyber troops supporting Ganjar and Jokowi. It continues with Ganjar's supporters viewing him as a presidential candidate in general elections 2024, and Jokowi's supporters without specific characteristics. However, the involvement of ordinary citizens in this hashtag is not very extensive. This indicates that this hashtag is contaminated by cyber troops deliberately mobilized to support it. When #TerimakasihPakSBY uses its hashtag with clear

indications of Democratic Party members, as evident from their Twitter content that specifically depicts and informs about aspects of the Democratic Party, it is in contrast to #SBYBapakHoax. The troops involved in this hashtag do not show that they are members of the PDI-P party, which is the party of origin for Jokowi and Ganjar Pranowo. The accounts supporting Ganjar only emphasize Ganjar's figure without providing information that points to the characteristics of a party member. Similarly, the cyber troops' accounts with specific characteristics in their content raise national issues and criticize presidential candidates from external groups like Anies Baswaden. They also post messages of support for Ganjar Pranowo, both in the form of original posts and retweets from their fellow group members. The characteristics of the buzzers, who are part of the cybertroops involved in #SBYBapakHoax can be seen in Table.3 below.

Table 3. The characteristics of the buzzers, who are part of the cybertroops involved in #SBYBapakHoax

Characteristics of the buzzers
1. They have specific characteristics in their profiles, such as the presence of words like NKRI, GASRI, BOOMBERS, or hashtags like #gerakan merah putih, #jalinpersatuan. They also have symbols like the red and white flag or other red and white-colored symbols. Additionally, some accounts use images of wayang in their profiles. Examples :

2. Their posting activity predominantly consists of retweets or reposting from major buzzer accounts, which are accounts with a large

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following, or they retweet accounts that share similar characteristics with them. On average, they make more than 5 posts a day. Their tweets consistently include the same memes as other accounts with similar characteristics, accompanied by relevant hashtags.

3. They have a substantial number of followers and follow accounts with similar characteristics.
  4. They move or post tweets simultaneously or at the same time.
  5. They rarely, if ever, post about personal activities.
  6. Their posts consistently feature political figures they support while criticizing opposing political figures, or they consistently focus on the topics to be addressed in the hashtag.
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Source: Processed by the author

## Discussion

Twitter has the potential to enhance political participation. The retweet feature on Twitter provides a robust mechanism for the dissemination of political information and opinions through their networks. Publicly, Twitter can be used to reinforce an individual's political views or thoughts. Twitter messages, or tweets, often convey relevant information about the writer's sentiments. Positive and negative emotions expressed in tweets are more likely to spread within the Twitter network and can influence the process of shaping political opinions (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2012). Additionally, Twitter facilitates communication between communities with different political orientations. Individuals with political motivations provoke interactions by injecting partisan content into the information stream primarily followed by users with opposing views (Conove et al., 2011). This phenomenon demonstrates the occurrence of affective polarization within the context of social media (Twitter).

Using a combination of social network analysis and content analysis, this study identifies whether affective polarization occurring on Indonesian Twitter, specifically in the case of #SBYBapakhoax and #TerimakasihPakSBY, is polluted by cyber

troops. The trigger for these hashtags was Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's statement regarding potential election fraud in 2024. Our findings indicate that the #SBYBapakhoax hashtag is contaminated by cyber troops with specific characteristics, as mentioned in the results. Affective polarization occurs between partisans or supporters of political parties. In this case, #SBYBapakHoax primarily consists of cyber troops and supporters of Jokowi and Ganjar Pranowo, who are members of the PDI party. On the other hand, #TerimakasihPakSBY is generally filled by Democratic Party members. The natural polarization in this case would be between supporters of the PDIP party and supporters of the Democratic Party. However, in this case, there are also supporters of Anies Baswedan and cyber troops involved. The involvement of Anies supporters in #TerimakasihPakSBY is normal due to the coalition between the Democratic Party, Nasdem party, and PKS party at the time of the hashtag's emergence. However, the presence of cyber troops in #SBYBapakhoax is an intriguing phenomenon.

Starting with the analysis of the total number of tweets and retweets for both hashtags, it was observed that the number of retweets for #SBYBapakHoax exceeded the number of original tweets. Conversely, for #TerimakasihPakSBY, the opposite was observed, with a higher number of original tweets compared to retweets. This initial finding raises questions and prompts further investigation into the differences between the two hashtags. The high number of retweets indicates the presence of a coordinated network or group. This is reinforced by the subsequent finding that this retweet activity occurs simultaneously at the same time. Similarly, for #TerimakasihPakSBY, it can be observed that tweet activity also happens concurrently. This suggests that this hashtag is engaged in a counter-response, primarily targeting existing accounts, especially those of Democratic Party members and official party accounts. Both of these observations

indicate that these hashtags gained traction through the mobilization of accounts, relying on tweet postings for #TerimakasihPakSBY and retweets for #SBYBapakHoax. Furthermore, in order to determine if bots were involved in these hashtags, we utilized the assistance of Botometer. The results showed that approximately 60% of the top accounts in both tweet and retweet activities for both hashtags approached a score of 5, indicating potential bot-like behavior. Bots serve to amplify content in the initial stages of dissemination, before an article goes viral (Shao et al., 2018).

Next, we conducted a network analysis between users in both hashtags. The results showed that for #SBYBapakhoax, there are two distinct clusters. One cluster contains only one central account, indicating an account attempting to counter #SBYBapakhoax, but this account holds an opposing stance. However, this account uses #SBYBapakhoax to counter, resulting in the hashtag gaining more traction and benefiting the opposing party. It took 3-4 hours for the Democratic Party to prepare the counter-hashtag.

Meanwhile, the other cluster indicates strong cooperation between supporters of Jokowi-Ganjar and cyber troops with specific characteristics. Their presence in one cluster indicates their interconnectedness, differing only in the symbols they use. In contrast, #TerimakasihPakSBY does not exhibit two clusters; there is only one cluster clearly dominated by the Democratic Party. This is evidenced by the prominent figures involved in the hashtag, who are accounts belonging to Democratic Party members, aided by supporters of Anies Baswedan and ordinary citizens.

The #TerimakasihPakSBY hashtag comprises policies from the era of SBY's government that were deemed successful. Conversely, #SBYBapakHoax consists of policies perceived as failures during SBY's presidency. This indicates that the raised issue, which is about the past (the government during SBY's era), becomes a powerful political tool as stated by Farrell (Farrell-Banks, 2022), that the

past can be a potent political instrument that can stir emotions and instill confidence in someone to engage in political action.

Furthermore, to reinforce the network analysis results, we conducted content analysis on each account by categorizing tweets into several categories. This categorization indicates that the hashtags are populated by coordinated cyber troops (buzzer) efficiently launching attacks against their opponents, in this case, the Democratic Party. This includes activities ranging from creating tweets accompanied by memes, engaging in tweet counterattacks against opponents, retweeting within their own group, to the category of groups tasked with rallying their own allies and opponents to trigger conflicts. The tweets disseminated by these buzzer groups consistently follow a similar pattern: a tweet followed by a meme and hashtag. The placement of these elements may vary, but the pattern remains consistent. Memes highlight issues related to SBY, cartoons likened to SBY, and derogatory remarks about SBY and the Democratic Party, all of which reflect the dislike this hashtag group holds towards SBY and the Democratic Party. Central accounts, such as Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono, the son of SBY who is speculated to be a potential vice-presidential candidate, and the official account of the Democratic Party, are frequently mentioned by the opposing side. Memes expressing disapproval of SBY and the Democratic Party are countered by the Democratic Party, who release memes containing infographics about successful policies during SBY's tenure.

Finally, we reinforced our analysis by examining the content from each account involved in both hashtags. The results show that #TerimakasihPakSBY is primarily populated by key figures from within the Democratic Party, specifically Democratic Party members themselves. On the other hand, in the case of #SBYBapakhoax, the majority of participants are key figures from accounts exhibiting specific characteristics or symbols, as mentioned in our



findings. This has led to a contamination of the authenticity of the hashtag.

These groups or troops with specific characteristics/symbols engage in the following activities: supporting the presidential candidate from the PDIP party, Ganjar Pranowo; criticizing presidential candidates from external groups; criticizing and contesting the government; promoting activities and policies of the Jokowi administration through pro-government hashtags; supporting vice-presidential candidate Erick Tohir; expressing anti-radicalism sentiments with religious connotations. Based on their activities, there is a possibility of government involvement in this matter and this phenomenon also demonstrates one of the characteristics of post-truth conditions as described by Cosentino (Cosentino, 2020) which is widespread in Western democracies, or (Boler & Davis, 2020) post-truth refers to circumstances in which objective facts have less influence on shaping public opinion compared to efforts to influence emotions and personal beliefs.

In essence, it is normal for internal factions to oppose external factions, as is the case here between Democratic Party partisans and PDIP partisans. This is because the Democratic Party is an opposition party outside the government, which consistently criticizes the PDIP as the ruling party. They are not in the same coalition like the Democrats with the PKS.

Then, what about the political situation that changed after this research, namely AHY's failure to become Anies's vice president and the Democratic Party's exit from the coalition and joining Prabowo's camp? We then reanalyzed the content of users previously identified as cyber troops and involved in the #SBYBapakHoax hashtag. We found that they are divided: users who continue to support presidential candidate Ganjar-Mahfud and users who switched to supporting Prabowo, who is paired with Jokowi's son, Gibran. Previously, these accounts were supporters of Jokowi and Ganjar. We also found that several accounts are no longer active. This

change indicates that affective polarization is also related to political camps, where preferences and dislikes can occur not only between party A and party B but also among political camps. This was also evident during this research, with the participation of Anies supporters in #TerimakasihPakSBY. This phenomenon is consistent with what was done by Bantel (Bantel, 2023).

## Conclusion

Affective polarization doesn't just occur offline, but can also manifest online. In this study, we examined affective polarization in the online context, specifically on Twitter. We used #SBYBapakHoax and #TerimakasihPakSBY as cases that illustrate forms of affective polarization happening on Indonesian Twittersphere. Both hashtags reflect sentiments of animosity between internal and external groups. They emerged on the same day and quickly gained traction, making them trending topics. The rapid trending activity caught our attention, prompting us to delve deeper to determine if this affective polarization was occurring naturally or not. By "natural," we mean hashtags intentionally created and promoted by partisan groups from both the internal and external factions. Here are our findings: Firstly, posts in both hashtags were made simultaneously at certain times; the SBYBapakHoax hashtag relied on the number of retweets, while the TerimakasihPakSBY hashtag relied on the number of tweets to trend. Users also used the same memes in each of their posts. Secondly, social network analysis revealed that #SBYBapakHoax was populated by key actors with affiliations to supporters of Jokowi and Ganjar, specific cyber troops with characteristic symbols, and Democratic Party members who used counter-hashtags to quickly respond to their adversaries. On the other hand, #TerimakasihPakSBY was populated by key actors from the party itself or internal groups, supporters of Anies Baswedan, and ordinary citizens. Thirdly, cyber troops with similar

characteristics and symbols were identified as part of the government, as indicated by their activities on their respective profiles. They not only posted support for presidential candidate Ganjar Pranowo but also shared information about the activities and policies of Jokowi and his government on their timelines

Based on these results, we conclude that the affective polarization observed in #SBYBapakHoax and #TerimakasihPakSBY is not a natural occurrence, but rather tainted by cyber troops who are amplifying #SBYBapakHoax. This finding indicates that the animosity between the insider and outsider groups can be manipulated in a way that poses a threat to the democratic progress in Indonesia.

The findings of this study provide a novelty in studying affective polarization in the online context, namely the need to investigate the backgrounds of users involved in affective polarization occurring on social media before examining the context of affective polarization that occurs in various conversations triggering emotions and conflicts from users, which often happen before and during election periods. The cyber troop activities aimed at silencing SBY's statements regarding potential election fraud through the #SBYBapakHoax hashtag indicate an unhealthy deliberation system. This aligns

with what was conveyed by Mansbridge et al. (Mansbridge et al., 2012) that a healthy deliberative system is one that fulfills epistemic, ethical, and democratic functions, and the study by Gervais (2015) that poor communication or improper and uncivil political conversations lead to feelings of anger and discomfort that make deliberation difficult.

This study certainly has its limitations, which should be addressed in future research. It is crucial to explore other hashtags to strengthen these findings, and further studies can delve deeper into the actors behind the emergence of emotionally polarized hashtags. Our study also has limitations in tracing and further exploring who the actors are behind these cyber troops, and these shortcomings could be addressed by future research. We also suggest that future research involve scholars from other fields, such as computer science, to sharpen the analysis related to networks and user activities in the digital space. We hope that the results of this study will complement the understanding of affective polarization in the online context. It can assist individuals who use social media as a political preference in identifying cyber troops, or what we refer to as "buzzers," in political discussions. This way, they can make informed political decisions in the general elections.

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