Security Blueprint

KONRAD
ADENAUER
STIFTUNG

A Reimagined Approach to Election Integrity:
Disinformation in BARMM's Fragile Post-conflict Democracy

Johnson K. Badawi

Executive Summary

Disinformation is a potential trigger of instability, particularly during critical periods like elections. In this regard, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), which will hold its first parliamentary elections, is especially vulnerable to the destabilizing effects of disinformation on democratic elections in light of the region's unique and fragile socio-political landscape and security context, characterized by weak institutions and sporadic violence. Moreover, the rapid increase in social media usage, limited literacy, and the absence of comprehensive disinformation policies exacerbate the BARMM region's susceptibility.

Unfortunately, existing interventions and measures have been insufficient in combating the sophisticated and pervasive nature of election-related disinformation. In this context, this policy paper suggests a multi-pronged approach, including voter education, peace covenants, civic education and digital citizenship, continuous investment, and the development of frameworks and guidelines on disinformation to address election-related disinformation more effectively.

Through these recommendations, this policy paper hopes to contribute to protecting the Bangsamoro and its nascent democratic process and ensure that the BARMM's first parliamentary election is credible and safe, rendering the Bangsamoro a proof of concept that negotiation and political settlement are effective strategies in addressing social conflicts.

Introduction

Recent experiences from different parts of the world have demonstrated how social media influence democracies. In the Philippines, online and digital spaces have been a principal force in shaping the outcome of the 2022 national election.[1] Specifically, the 2022 election results confirmed the increasing mobilization of social media in grabbing and consolidating power by influencing the attitudes, decisions, and perceptions of truth among the electorate, especially in a country facing longstanding and deep-rooted problems within its electoral structures and systems.

In this context, disinformation or "false information deliberately and often covertly spread to influence public opinion or obscure the truth" is considered to be one of the "most insidious threats to democracy" and elections.[2] Disinformation endangers democracy as it steals the opportunity from the electorate to make accurate and informed decisions. It especially thrives during election periods where political outcomes are volatile and success hinges on public support.[3] As social media provides a potent platform for its spread, disinformation then becomes one of the wicked strategies to secure public backing by discrediting, and sometimes, even dehumanizing, election opponents.

This discourse is especially vital now as politicians gear up for the national election, where the virtual space will again be an enabling ground not only for campaigning but also for the spread of election-related disinformation.

As of January 2024, the reported population of the Philippines is 118.2 million.[4] Among them, 86.98 million are reported to be internet users as of 2024, with 86.75 million internet users also active on Facebook.[5] Hence, it is not surprising how disinformation, primarily online, finds fertile ground considering Filipinos' penchant for social media. Combine this with the existence of malign political actors willing to exploit the people to achieve their political ends at whatever societal cost, and we find ourselves in a situation wherein disinformation has gradually penetrated the fabric of society and has become a staple strategy of political operations. In fact, a 2019 report on digital disinformation during the 2019 Philippine elections published by New Mandala, a forum for anecdote, analysis, and new perspectives on Southeast Asia, posited that digital operations have become "more prevalent, strategically obscured, and influential in shaping political conversations."[6] These insidious and sophisticated operations are no longer at the periphery of political campaigns but take center stage in shaping political outcomes. While social media is not the sole determinant of electoral outcomes, it complements "old-school negative propaganda on the ground."[7]

In another extensive report, Dr. Jonathan Ong, Associate Professor at the University of Massachusetts, and Dr. Jason Cabanes, Lecturer at the University of Leeds, described the architects of networked disinformation as "a professionalized and hierarchized group of political operators who design disinformation campaigns, mobilize click armies, and execute innovative operations for interested political clients."[8] Content creators are employed in deploying inflammatory messages to attack candidates.[9] Despite the massive amount spent on social media by political candidates, overspending on campaigns on social media is either undisclosed or underreported. In addition, the bulk of disinformation is found on affiliate or unofficial pages of politicians. These pages have fewer engagements but reach unsuspecting users, anyway. The insignificant engagement makes evasion of fact-checkers easy.[10]

In this political environment, the case of the Philippines' emerging regional democracy, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), is of particular interest as it will conduct its first parliamentary election. BARMM is known for its notorious history as a hotspot for election-related

violence, and a think tank posits the high possibility for the Bangsamoro region to have another bloody election.[11]

However, there is no doubt that the successful conduct of the BARMM parliamentary and regional elections will serve as the litmus test of the Bangsamoro's resilience to traditional sources of instability. Furthermore, as the Bangsamoro electorate and political players gain awareness of the possible uses of social media, the resilience of the Bangsamoro and its democratic structures to non-traditional risks such as disinformation is put to the test.[12]

Within this context, I argue that disinformation can undermine the credibility of the Bangsamoro electoral process. Hence, there is an imperative to strengthen the resilience of post-conflict BARMM and its democratic institutions, particularly elections, against the potentially destabilizing impact of election-related disinformation. Understanding disinformation and instituting preventive policies are crucial to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process and outcome.

Ultimately, the success of the first regional parliamentary election entails a win for the Bangsamoro peace process, further reinforcing that conflict resolution and political settlement are viable options for resolving protracted conflicts, upholding democracy and the rule of law, and facilitating long-term peace and development.

Disinformation in a fragile democracy

In countries marked by political and societal instability, disinformation takes on a more layered pattern.[13] First, the contents of disinformation mirror historical social tensions. Second, due to limited news sources, people in conflict situations rely on social media for news. Social media often enables misinformation, disinformation, and fake news to go unchecked and spread rapidly. Finally, inauthentic accounts or trolls that mislead people are found to be the most common tool used by political actors to distribute disinformation. In communities marked with instability, trust in government institutions is also low or declining, which may cause the occurrence of vigilantism that is further inflamed by social media.[14]

Although solid empirical evidence on the link between disinformation and election violence is scant, there is some indication that disinformation can play an indirect role in facilitating instability as it may legitimize and accelerate violence. Disinformation draws from and fuels polarization, especially during election periods where issues are politically and socially charged to incite emotions. This is consistent with a study demonstrating the definitive role of disinformation in polarizing societies.[15] Polarization occurs through the spread of degrading discourses that reinforce in/outgroup identification. Case studies demonstrate how disinformation fueled existing cleavages and contributed to violence in the US-Mexico border, India and Sri Lanka, and three Latin American elections in 2018.[16] In Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico, the high prevalence of disinformation on social media is suspected to have influenced the electoral climate with violence as one of its hallmark features.[17]

Furthermore, at its extreme, polarization can evolve into violent behavior extending beyond the online space. This claim is consistent with the experiences in different parts of the globe on social media-induced real-world harm and violence. For instance, disinformation has a positive association with several forms of political violence in Europe.[18] Cases in Myanmar point to the role of Facebook in fanning the flame of ethnic violence.[19] Social media as an accessible platform can serve as a mechanism to propagate violence by allowing the spread of extreme viewpoints.[20] These cases show that disinformation is a complicated problem that has morphed over time.

Unmasking disinformation in the Bangsamoro

In the Bangsamoro, disinformation occurs both offline and online. Wrong information is still propagated in traditional forms of media, whether through radio, text, or in-person social activities.[21] As early as 2019, the proliferation of disinformation was witnessed during the campaign to pass the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL). In the lead-up to the ratification of BOL, early signs of adversarial and negative online discourse characterized by mudslinging and fearmongering were present.[22] This spread of disinformation led to (under)reported cases of violence.[23]

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority's 2020 Census of Population and Housing, the Bangsamoro Region has the lowest number of households with internet access at 1.7%.[24] Despite the region's weak internet infrastructure, the number and activity of internet users have increased significantly over the past years.[25] The propensity to use social media is observed in the ability of people to participate in online forums and the increasing membership in groups about Bangsamoro and related topics. This entails that the Bangsamoro is not an exception in the onslaught of disinformation.

Recent cases of disinformation reported in the Special Geographic Areas (SGA), consisting of eight BARMM municipalities in the province of North Cotabato, have disrupted stability with false claims of armed men attacking the municipality of Midsayap, North Cotabato.[26] Recently, a fake hate quote attributed to a Bangsamoro Government official was posted after the bombing in Marawi City in December 2023.[27] In May 2024, fake contents hinting at the Mindanao call for independence circulated online, with some contents going viral, highlighting the role of deepfakes and cheapfakes in polluting and twisting narratives.[28]

In the run-up to the BARMM's first regional elections, rising disinformation is being reported and causing alarm.[29] Unchecked content has started to propagate online. Polarized messages from the political parties, key personalities, and their supporters are steadily becoming more visible. On Facebook, the disinformation trend is expected to heighten as the official election period commences and will peak around election day.[30] Most politicians display restraint in posting disinformation. However, their supporters—using their personal accounts or hiding behind a Facebook page—are active peddlers of disinformation and instigators of polarized discussion.[31] In the Bangsamoro, it is not uncommon to see Facebook posts of seemingly controversial political content (e.g., photos) without clear context, making them susceptible to be twisted by the supporters of their political opponents.[32] Disinformation, as one of the potential alarming tactics of capable and resource-rich political actors, risks a future parliament dominated by traditional forces, bereft of genuine representation.[33]

This situation is further exacerbated by the lack of critical skills, and the learning poverty among Filipino students also enables disinformation to thrive. In a study published by the National Association for Media Literacy that was participated by more than 20,000 eligible voters in 2022, the findings concluded that Filipino students have average skills in identifying fake news. Similar results were highlighted in another study showing that most students only have beginner-level competency in author-checking, fact-checking, and bias-checking.[34] In the Bangsamoro, the literacy rate is at 86.4%, the lowest in the Philippines.[35] In a key informant interview, Atty. Michael Henry Yusingco, Senior Research Fellow at the Ateneo de Manila University – School of Government, predicates that young people's weak critical skills reinforce their inability to discern what is the truth online.[36]

Given this socio-political landscape, the absence of preventive and mitigating measures makes disinformation a grave threat that can widen existing social and political fractures among the Bangsamoro people.[37] Unfortunately, this risk can increasingly manifest during highly contested periods such as the elections, which may trigger instability or conflict.

Existing interventions and their limitations

Policies and legislation on disinformation in the Philippines are limited. At the national level, bills to penalize any person who offers, publishes, distributes, circulates, and spreads false news or information have not progressed despite civil society organizations' strong call for reforms. The lack of clear regulatory legal frameworks renders the action of identifying and addressing disinformation difficult.[38] Ongoing proposed legislations were met with resistance by journalists and advocates, noting the possibility of such measures being used to stifle press freedom.[39]

Other notable efforts include the creation of Task Force *Kontra Fake News* (Task Force against Fake News) in 2022, now rebranded as Task Force *Katotohanan, Katapatan at Katarungan* or *KKK sa Halalan* (Task Force on Truth, Honesty, and Justice in the Election), to tackle fake news. Task Force KKK is tasked to monitor and regulate posted and published content on quad-media (TV, radio, print, and online), including attacks or malicious information against the Commission on Elections (Comelec) and its officials and the electoral process.[40] However, the fake news targeted are those that are spread to attack the Comelec and not necessarily the disinformation against the candidates or the broader electoral process, making the remit of the task force constricted considering the sophisticated and profit-driven nature of disinformation. Another measure to combat online disinformation is the verification of YouTube channels by Comelec, in cooperation with YouTube, to avoid the proliferation of untrustworthy and unreliable sources of information.[41]

In the lead-up to the first regional election, Comelec issued Resolution No. 11064, which establishes guidelines for the use of social media, artificial intelligence, and internet technology in digital election campaigns for the 2025 National, local, and supposed BARMM Parliamentary Elections. The resolution aims to prevent disinformation and misinformation, requiring candidates, political parties, and campaign teams to register official online platforms. It mandates transparency for AI-generated content, bans malicious use of technology (e.g., deepfakes, fake news), and empowers the Task Force KKK to monitor compliance, enforce rules, and recommend sanctions for violations.[42] A poll watchdog, however, has called for the repeal of the guidelines as it can be weaponized for censorship in the guise of fighting fake news.[43]

At the BARMM level, policies on disinformation are also lacking. Despite policy recommendations to include provisions on preventing and addressing disinformation, the Bangsamoro Electoral Code (BEC) that guides the parliamentary election processes ended up devoid of provisions on disinformation. Closely resembling the national election law, the BEC hints at social media under Article VIII: Election Offenses. The provision states that "Any candidate, officer, member, or supporter of a political party who uses scandalous, inflammatory, foul, abusive, and derogatory language in speeches, interviews, and on social media in the course of the campaign or during political rallies and meetings" are guilty of election offenses.[44] This provision reveals the Bangsamoro policymakers' limited understanding and appreciation of the power of social media in influencing the electoral process and outcome through the proliferation of election misinformation and disinformation.

The Bangsamoro Information Office (BIO) plays a central role in promoting transparency and moral governance and enriching the quality of public discourse. One of the interventions of the BIO is the *Halalang Bangsamoro* – a wordplay of the Filipino word *halal*, meaning to vote or elect, and the Arabic word *halal*, meaning permissible. This comprehensive voter education campaign aims to educate the Bangsamoro public on the electoral process, candidate qualifications, and voter registration for the parliamentary election. However, the campaign is not explicit in targeting disinformation, and some journalists consider

it a mere PR tool.[45] In general, a regulatory gap exists, which makes the Bangsamoro voters vulnerable to disinformation.[46]

Another common intervention in the Bangsamoro is signing peace covenants among political rivals. These agreements are usually brokered by the Comelec, traditional leaders, and civil society organizations. While perhaps important in managing electoral violence and cessation of hostilities, the existing covenants are usually narrow in scope and do not include provisions addressing disinformation and inflammatory messaging from politicians and their supporters. Recent forums with political parties in BARMM included commitments to protect electoral integrity and tackle misinformation and disinformation.[47] However, what this means in terms of concrete action remains unknown, especially as monitoring provisions are not incorporated.

Interestingly, digital peacebuilding that embeds disinformation and usage of social media on peace agreements has emerged in other jurisdictions.[48] For example, in South Sudan, an agreement signed by the parties includes a provision stating, "Reduce hate speech/propaganda and misinformation of communities including on social media."[49] Similarly, Nigeria's Code of Conduct for Responsible Social Media in Kaduna State in the 2023 elections has a line underlining disinformation: "Refrain from posting disinformation about political opponents and the election process and commit to fact checking [sic] all information before posting online. Use only genuine and official accounts on social media and refrain from using fake accounts or inauthentic networks to mislead or undermine the election process."[50] Nevertheless, digital peacebuilding still remains absent in the toolkit of Bangsamoro peacebuilders and decision-makers.

Voter education activities are common in every election. In the context of the first parliamentary election, voter education is crucial to inform first-time Bangsamoro voters about the election process. However, the result of a recent survey by the Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG) confirms the Bangsamoro's lack of awareness of the new voting system and its key features.[51] Civil society organizations, including the academe and media groups, are among the most active actors on the voter education front at the moment. They complement the Comelec and the Bangsamoro Government's efforts to increase voters' awareness of the Electoral Code and what it means to them. However, only a few voter education efforts include sessions on disinformation and misinformation.

Addressing election-related disinformation in the Bangsamoro

In light of the political environment and observed gaps, I propose short- and long-term interlinked recommendations that are grounded on prevention and inclusion toward the prevention and mitigation of the risks associated with election disinformation as follows:

1. Bolster and institutionalize digital citizenship.

Digital citizenship aims to equip Filipinos, particularly young people, with critical skills that will enable them to discern information not only online but also offline more carefully and accurately. In the short- and mid-term, incorporating digital citizenship in voter education interventions by the regional government, Comelec, and civil society organizations will suffice to address the urgency of the disinformation problem. Voter education materials should be tailored to the audience using a combination of engaging text and visual content. Lastly, given the increasing popularity of Bangsamoro digital influencers, their role and clout should be leveraged in voter education to help amplify correct information and tackle disinformation.

Serving as a comprehensive and long-term strategy, institutionalized digital citizenship will reduce the susceptibility of online users to disinformation. The Bangsamoro Parliament must pass legislation to institutionalize digital citizenship in the school curriculum to ensure that the youth are taught how to verify and fact-check information during their formative years. Comelec and the Bangsamoro Ministry of Basic, Higher and Technical Education (MBHTE) should also work closely in designing a curriculum tailored to the Bangsamoro learners and fit the peculiarities of the Bangsamoro context.

2. Strengthen the role of civil society and citizens in fact-checking, monitoring, and reporting disinformation and inflammatory content.

This recommendation harnesses the power of civil society organizations and everyday Bangsamoro, who have the tools to track social media and elections effectively. An initial step is to strengthen the coordination around monitoring and moderation of content online during elections. The watchdog role of civil society organizations should be fortified to ensure compliance with election and guidelines, particularly those related to the use of social media and disinformation. One concrete approach is the formation of a CSO-citizen council that will be responsible for fact-checking and coordinating with authorities to act on reported disinformation cases.

The BARMM Regional Government and Comelec should also be more intentional in involving civil society organizations, especially journalists trained in fact-checking. Supporting independent and local journalists will be critical in vetting, providing, and fact-checking information for the Bangsamoro public. They are also key in crafting alternative information and debunking wrong information. The support for journalism should include financial incentives in the form of grants, for example.

3. Integrate concrete actions against disinformation in multi-party forums and peace covenants.

Leveraging ongoing Comelec and CSO-led efforts to convene political parties in a dialogue to develop manifestos on protecting electoral integrity should also be considered. These manifestos must include provisions on the use of social media across the election cycle. Clear monitoring, transparency, and accountability mechanisms must be incorporated to help reduce and mitigate the risk of disinformation and inflammatory social media content. These agreements should cover and encourage honest and clean online behavior the candidates as well as their supporters. These covenants should be publicized to increase the likelihood of the signatories' compliance. Throughout the process, civil society should function as watchdogs or guide dogs to enforce compliance and facilitate problem-solving and incident resolution.

4. Reimagine the role of the Comelec to take a more proactive role in tackling disinformation.

The Comelec can further enhance its current efforts in addressing disinformation. On monitoring, Comelec should keep an eye on both online and traditional media, with the latter being a crucial actor in the context of BARMM but is often overlooked when it comes to disinformation.

Particularly in the online space, Comelec should strictly enforce the registration of official social media pages of political parties. Affiliate social media pages of the parties and their supporters should also be registered. The registration of these pages will guarantee proper tracking of the politician's online behavior and enforce accountability for content posted.

In coordination with relevant government offices, Comelec must institute stronger monitoring mechanisms to check the content of social media pages throughout the election cycle, particularly on election day.

The Commission should be more proactive in releasing contents that that swiftly rectify disinformation. Moderating the use of social media among the candidates and their supporters can also be explored. Moreover, the Comelec's existing task force can expand its remit to include monitoring online content and compliance with policies and guidelines. Further extending the task force's role, it should facilitate the removal of reported non-compliant and verified disinformation content, followed by real-time updates on actions taken. The interventions of the task force should be synergized with existing initiatives by civil society organizations. Close cooperation and collaboration with CSOs, including local and independent journalists, must be enhanced. Most importantly, caution should be taken to protect and avoid infringing on the people's constitutional rights and media freedom.

5. Develop evidence-based policies and guidelines at the Bangsamoro Regional Government.

The lack of comprehensive policies addressing disinformation at the national level presents an opportunity for the Bangsamoro Parliament to take the lead in legislating measures specifically tailored to combat disinformation, particularly during elections. Given the inadequate understanding of disinformation in the Bangsamoro Region, the Policy Research and Legal Services (PRLS), the legislative research arm of the Bangsamoro Parliament, should conduct extensive and comprehensive research to further determine the nuances of disinformation. The research output should inform the parliament's proposed policies.

Overall, policies should establish a clear regulatory framework that precisely defines disinformation to ensure consistent applications. The framework should provide appropriate incentives and penalties toward promoting compliance and truthful information dissemination. Robust enforcement mechanisms through regulatory bodies must also be revisited and improved. Nevertheless, proposed frameworks should consider the evolving nature of the digital landscape.

Engaging in meaningful consultations and deliberations with civil society organizations and the broader segment of the Bangsamoro community is crucial in crafting this policy. This inclusive approach will guarantee that the resulting policy reflects a diverse range of perspectives and is sensitive to the unique context of the Bangsamoro.

6. Continue investment and support against disinformation.

International development partners must continue supporting the Bangsamoro, particularly in tackling disinformation. While investments have been poured into broader peacebuilding and democracy work, support for long-term digital citizenship and civic education work streams must be bolstered. Donor governments should work with key regional stakeholders and civil society organizations in knowledge-sharing on good practices in addressing disinformation. Some donors are also well-placed to offer technology-based solutions in monitoring, flagging, and moderating online content. Finally, the development partners' network can be leveraged to access social media platforms to demand for accountability and extend the responsibility in resolving disinformation.

A path forward against disinformation

Indeed, the stakes are high in the forthcoming parliamentary elections in the Bangsamoro. The success of the electoral process will provide early indications of both democratic progress and the strength of the peace process. The elections are significant as they offer a chance for genuine social and political transformation in a region that has endured long periods of conflict. However, the path forward is fraught with challenges and uncertainty. Beyond the traditional threats of security issues and election violence,

non-traditional threats such as disinformation are surfacing as a critical force to reckon with, especially as its shape and form continue to evolve over time.

While knowledge of its effects in post-conflict and transitioning contexts remains limited, experiences from other regions highlight disinformation's insidious role. Now more than ever, it is crucial to understand and address this emerging threat through proactive, innovative, and preventive measures. To prevent disinformation from causing significant disruption, developing solutions in collaboration with key sectors of Bangsamoro society is imperative. Furthermore, instituting both short-term and long-term policies will ensure that the Bangsamoro has improved resilience to sustain the gains of the peace process.

References

1   Aries A. Arugay, "Stronger social media influence in the 2022 Philippine Elections," *Fulcrum,* April 14, 2022, https://fulcrum.sg/stronger-social-media-influence-in-the-2022-philippine-elections/.

2   Carme Colomina, Héctor Sánchez Margalef, Richard Youngs, "The impact of disinformation on democratic processes and human rights in the world," *Think Tank European Parliament*, April 22, 2021, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EXPO_STU(2021)653635.

3   Karim Doumar and Cynthia Gordy Giwa, "How to Outsmart Election Disinformation," *ProPublica*, October 21, 2022, https://www.propublica.org/article/misinformvation-vs-disinformation-midterm-election-guide.

4   Simon Kemp, "Digital 2024: The Philippines," *DataReportal*, February 21, 2024, https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-philippines.

5   Ibid.

6   Jonathan Corpus Ong, Ross Tapsell, Nicole Curato, "Tracking Digital Disinformation in the 2019 Philippine Midterm Election, *New Mandala*, August 2019, https://www.newmandala.org/disinformation/.

7   Michael Henry Yusingco, "Rethinking Filipinos' social media use in the electoral process," *Asian Studies Association of Australia*, June 7, 2019, https://asaa.asn.au/rethinking-filipinos-social-media-use-in-the-electoral-process/.

8   Jonathan Corpus Ong, and Jason Vincent A. Cabañes, "Architects of Networked Disinformation: Behind the Scenes of Troll Accounts and Fake News Production in the Philippines," *UMass ScholarWorks*, January 1, 2018, https://doi.org/10.7275/2cq4-5396.

9   Fatima Gaw, Jon Benedik A. Bunquin, Samuel I. Cabbuag, Jose Mari H. Lanuza, Noreen H. Sapalo, and Al-Habbyel B. Yusoph, "Political Economy of Covert Influence Operations in the 2022 Philippine Elections," *Internews*, July 31, 2023, https://internews.org/resource/political-economy-of-covert-influence-operations-in-the-2022-philippine-elections/.

10 LENTE, "A BALANCED APPROACH TO ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FOR THE 2025 PH ELECTIONS: ETHICAL GUIDELINES, TRANSPARENCY APPROACHES, AND POLITICAL EDUCATION," *Asian Network for Free Elections*, June 4, 2024, https://anfrel.org/a-balanced-approach-to-artificial-intelligence-for-the-2025-ph-elections-ethical-guidelines-transparency-approaches-and-political-education/.

11 Ryan D. Rosauro, "Group: Brace for more poll violence in 2025," *Inquirer.net*, November 4, 2023, https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1854727/group-brace-for-more-poll-violence-in-2025.

12 Michael Henry Yusingco, "Social media, disinformation, and the 2022 BARMM Parliamentary elections," *International Journal of Political Science and Public Administration* 1, no. 2 (2021): 25-33, https://archium.ateneo.edu/asog-pubs/199/.

13 Alexandra Stavros, Sarah Phalen, Sheriff Almakki, Moriah Nacionales-Tafoya, & Ramiro A. Garcia, "DISINFORMATION IN CONFLICT ENVIRONMENTS IN ASIA," April 8, 2023, https://diplomacy.umich.edu/sites/wdc/files/2023-05/disinformation-in-conflict-environments-in-asia.pdf.

14 Megan Wiard and Jessica Beyer, "Vulnerable Landscapes: Case Studies of Violence and Disinformation*," The Wilson Center*, August 2019, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/vulnerable-landscapes-case-studies-violence-and-disinformation.

15 Pramukh Nanjundaswamy Vasist, Debashis Chatterjee, Satish Krishnan, "The Polarizing Impact of Political Disinformation and Hate Speech: A Cross-country Configural Narrative," *Information Systems Frontiers* 26, (2023): 663-688, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-023-10390-w.

16 Ward & Beyer, "Case Studies of Violence and Disinformation."

17 Luiza Bandeira, Donara Barojan, Roberta Braga, Jose Luis Peñarredonda, Maria Fernanda Pérez Argüello, "Disinformation in democracies: Strengthening digital resilience in Latin America," *Atlantic Council*, March 28, 2019, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/disinformation-democracies-strengthening-digital-resilience-latin-america/.

18 Mina Rulis, "The Influences of Misinformation on Incidences of Politically Motivated Violence in Europe," *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, (2024), https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612241257873.

19 Moges Teshome, ""The Road to hell is paved with good intentions": The role of Facebook in fueling ethnic violence," *ASC*, accessed July 1, 2024, https://www.asc.upenn.edu/research/centers/milton-wolf-seminar-media-and-diplomacy/blog/road-hell-paved-good-intentions-role-facebook-fuelling-ethnic-violence.

20 Karsten Müller, Carlo Schwarz, "Fanning the Flames of Hate: Social Media and Hate Crime," *Journal of the European Economic Association* 19, no. 4 (2021): 2131-2167, https://doi.org/10.1093/jeea/jvaa045.

21 Ferdinandh Cabrera, interview by the author, September 19, 2024.

22 Divina Suson, "BTC official claims misinformation spread vs. BOL in Lanao Norte," *Philippine News Agency*, January 21, 2019, https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1059498.

23 Ibid.

24 "2020 Census of Population and Housing (2020 CPH) Population Counts Declared Official by the President," *Philippine Statistics Authority*, July 7, 2021, https://psa.gov.ph/content/2020-census-population-and-housing-2020-cph-population-counts-declared-official-president.

25 Yusingco, "Disinformation and the 2022 BARMM elections."

26 Ferdinandh Cabrera, interview by the author, September 19, 2024.

27 "FACT CHECK: BARMM official's 'hate quote' after MSU bombing is fake," *Rappler*, December 5, 2023, https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/fact-check/barmm-official-hate-quote-after-mindanao-state-university-bombing-fake/.

28 as D. Ocampo, "Memes, fake images trivializing Mindanao independence call," *Mindanews*, May 9, 2024, https://mindanews.com/top-stories/2024/05/memes-fake-images-trivialize-mindanao-independence-call/.

29 Y Edwin O. Fernandez, Germelina A. Lacorte, "In BARMM, rising disinformation as polls near worries group." *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, October 14, 2024, https://www.inquirer.net/417489/in-barmm-rising-disinformation-as-polls-near-worries-group/.

30 Ferdinandh Cabrera, interview by the author, September 19, 2024.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Margarita Felipe Fajardo, "Filipino Students' Competency in Evaluating Digital Media Content Credibility: 'Beginning' to 'Emerging' Levels." *Journal of Media Literacy Education* 15, no. 2 (2023): 58-70, https://doi.org/10.23860/JMLE-2023-15-2-5.

35 Ibid.

36 Michael Henry Yusingco, interview by the author, September 17, 2024.

37 Cheng Xu and Jacques Bertrand, "Barangay Elections in the Bangsamoro: A Crucial Test for the Future of the BARMM," *The Diplomat*, June 23, 2023, https://thediplomat.com/2023/06/barangay-elections-in-the-bangsamoro-a-crucial-test-for-the-future-of-the-barmm/.

38 Ibid.

39 TJ Burgonio, "Can Comelec regulate social media posts of candidates, influencers?," *PCIJ*, May 29, 2024, https://pcij.org/2024/05/29/comelec-regulate-candidates-social-media-posts-spending-tiktok-meta-twitter/.

40 Ferdinand Patino, "Task Force 'KKK sa Halalan' formed vs AI-driven mis/disinformation," *Philippine News Agency*, July 20, 2024, https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1229400.

41 Kristine Joy Patag, "Comelec: 393 Youtube channels of 2022 poll aspirants verified," *Philstar Global*, February 10, 2022, https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2022/02/10/2159896/comelec-393-youtube-channels-2022-poll-aspirants-verified.

42 Commission on Elections, "Resolution No. 11064: Guidelines on the Use of Social Media, Artificial Intelligence, and Internet Technology for the 2025 Elections,".September 2024.

43 Jerome Aning, "Comelec asked: Repeal rules on AI, social media," *Inquirer.net*, November 2, 2024, https://www.inquirer.net/419639/comelec-asked-repeal-rules-on-ai-social-media/.

44 Bangsamoro Transition Authority, "Bangsamoro Autonomy Act No. 35: An Act providing for the Bangsamoro Electoral Code of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao," 2022.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Rhoda Grace Saron, "BARMM political parties pledge to combat disinformation, misinformation," *Mindanao Times*, March 19, 2024, https://mindanaotimes.com.ph/barmm-political-parties-pledge-to-combat-disinformation-misinformation/.

48 "Monitoring of social media provision in peace agreements," *Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue,* May 1, 2024, https://hdcentre.org/insights/monitoring-of-social-media-provisions-in-peace-agreements-brief-by-hd-build-up-and-un-dppa/.

49 "Grassroots Agreement to Promote National Dialogue in Yei River State and South Sudan," *Peace Agreement Access Tool PA-X*, April 30, 2017.

50 "Code of Conduct for Responsible Social Media in Kaduna State During the 2023 Elections," *Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue*, November 2023.

51 "Education Campaign on the 2025 BARMM Elections Needs to be Accelerated, IAG Research Finds," *Institute for Autonomy and Governance*, June 20, 2024, https://iag.org.ph/news/1996-education-campaign-on-the-2025-barmm-elections-needs-to-be-accelerated-iag-research-finds.

The Author

Johnson K. Badawi is a young peacebuilder from Mindanao. He is currently the Peace Process Programme Officer at the British Embassy in Manila, where he supports the management of the UK's Integrated Security Fund in the Philippines. He was also an Adenauer Security Experts Network Philippines (SeEN PH) fellow from June to November 2024.

A licensed psychometrician, John has worked on conflict resolution and transformation programmes for both local and international organizations. Prior to his role at the British Embassy, he was a Project Associate at the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. He is also an alumnus of the Bridging Leadership program by the Asian Institute of Management and a member of the Democracy R&D Network.

His research interests are the intersection of political psychology, conflict, and gender and digital peacebuilding.

John is a recipient of the Asian Peacebuilders Scholarship and finished his master's degree in International Peace Studies and Global Politics from the United Nations-Mandated University for Peace in Costa Rica and the Ateneo de Manila University in Quezon City, respectively.

Imprint