



Peer-Review Report Form

Manuscript Title:	Political Noise and Disinformation in Southeast Asia: A Systematic Literature Review of Impacts on Democratic Discourse and Governance
Type of Article:	Review Article

FIRST ROUND

Editor

<u>General Comments and Recommendations</u>
The reviewers acknowledge the significance of your manuscript and recommend several revisions to further improve its clarity, coherence, organization, and overall scholarly quality. In addition, you are advised to thoroughly review and validate all references included in the manuscript. Please ensure that all cited sources are accurate, accessible, and retrievable through Google Scholar to uphold the credibility and reliability of the study. Additionally, make sure to include the DOI or website link for every reference to facilitate verification and accessibility of sources. Furthermore, only sources that are cited within the manuscript should appear in the References section, and all entries listed in the References section must also be cited in the text. For example, if 20 unique sources are cited in the manuscript, then only those 20 sources should be included in the References section. Please note that repeated citations of the same source within the text are counted as a single reference entry; therefore, the total number of references may be lower than the total number of in-text citations.

Reviewer 1

<u>General Comments and Recommendations</u>
The authors identify a crucial issue about information disorder within Southeast Asia. However, the manuscript requires substantial revisions before it achieves publication standards. The primary critical flaw lies in the incomplete nature of the study. The authors explicitly admit that the presented data only reflect a first batch of a larger corpus. Furthermore, a solitary researcher performed the initial evaluations, which severely undermines the reliability of any systematic review. A robust systematic literature review necessitates complete data collection and rigorous independent validation by multiple scholars. This manuscript reads like an early draft rather than a final submission. You must complete the entire data collection process before you seek publication.

<u>Specific Comments and Recommendations</u>
Title: The title is comprehensive and accurately reflects the proposed subject matter.
Abstract: The reliance on only 103 studies from a partial batch renders the conclusion premature.



Introduction: The authors must expand on why earlier periods, specifically 2010 to 2014, remain thinly documented.
Methodology: The admission that a single individual conducted the appraisal is a critical methodology failure. The authors acknowledge that a second scholar must independently verify the records before final submission.
Results: Because the data extraction remains unfinished, these results are provisional at best.
Discussion and Limitations: The admitted limitation about unresolved borderline cases, roughly 11 records, is unacceptable for a final submission. The authors must resolve these cases prior to publication.
References: The reference list appears structurally sound but will require updates once the authors complete the full data corpus.

Please indicate your recommendation by checking the appropriate box below.

<u>Decision</u>	
☐	Accept the manuscript for publication.
☐	Reconsider the manuscript after the authors have satisfactorily addressed and complied with the reviewers' comments and recommendations.
☐	Reject the manuscript, as it is not suitable for publication.

Reviewer 2

<u>General Comments and Recommendations</u>
The manuscript has an important and timely topic, and I can see the effort of the authors to organize a very broad literature on political noise and disinformation in Southeast Asia. However, my major concern is that the manuscript presently looks more like a descriptive summary of a large collection of sources than a fully auditable systematic review. The problem is not mainly the number of studies, but whether another researcher can trace how the 103 studies produced the conclusions being presented. The methodology states that many variables were extracted and that narrative and thematic synthesis was conducted, but the manuscript does not sufficiently show the actual analytical pathway from individual studies to themes and conclusions.
<u>Specific Comments and Recommendations</u>
The synthesis procedure is presently too vague to support the major findings. The authors simply state that findings were synthesized narratively and thematically because the evidence was heterogeneous. But there is no clear explanation how coding was performed, how initial codes became categories or themes, whether themes were deductive based on SRQ1-SRQ5 or inductively generated, how disagreements or ambiguous classifications were handled, and what rule was used before something was described as "frequent," "recurring," or "consistent." These words appear repeatedly in the Results, yet the reader cannot reconstruct how these judgments were obtained. This is a major methodological weakness. The authors should provide the complete synthesis procedure, preferably with a coding framework or analytical matrix showing how extracted evidence was converted into each reported theme.



There is almost no traceability from the 103 included studies to the reported conclusions. This is perhaps the biggest issue for me. The manuscript tells the reader that 103 studies were included, but no detailed characteristics-of-studies table is presented showing author, year, country, design, sample/source, exposure, outcome, and principal finding for each included study. The current tables only summarize publication type, period, country, and methodological design. More importantly, the thematic Results make broad claims such as weakened trust, political polarization, lower quality deliberation, contested electoral integrity, and institutional legitimacy, but the specific studies supporting these findings are generally not cited. A systematic review should allow the reader to see exactly which studies support which conclusion. I strongly recommend an evidence table and study-level citations throughout the synthesis.

The construct of “political noise” is not sufficiently separated from disinformation and related concepts. The manuscript defines political noise as excessive, repetitive, confusing, or polarizing political messages, while disinformation requires intentionally false or misleading information. However, the eligibility framework later combines political noise, disinformation, misinformation, propaganda, troll networks, coordinated manipulation, and algorithmic amplification into one exposure domain. These are not conceptually interchangeable phenomena. Some describe content, some intention, some actors, some communication processes, and some technological mechanisms. When these are combined too broadly, almost any problematic political communication may qualify for inclusion. The authors need to establish a much stricter conceptual taxonomy and then show which studies belong specifically to political noise, disinformation, misinformation, propaganda, coordinated manipulation, etc. Otherwise, the review risks conceptual overreach.

The search method is still not reproducible enough for a systematic review. The authors identify the databases and provide general blocks of keywords, but this is not enough for another researcher to reproduce the search. Exact database-specific search strings, Boolean operators, search fields, search dates, database coverage dates, Google Scholar screening limits, and the exact organizations or websites used for supplementary and grey-literature searching should be provided. “Southeast Asia-focused research institutions” and “recognized fact-checking organizations” are too open-ended descriptions. A supplementary search appendix containing the exact search strategy for every source would substantially improve the methodological credibility.

The eligibility criteria are described too generally and appear to leave considerable room for subjective decisions. The manuscript provides the broad PEO categories, but I could not find a sufficiently operational inclusion/exclusion framework specifying acceptable publication types, study designs, minimum political relevance, treatment of regional versus single-country studies, handling of commentaries or policy documents, and what qualifies as an eligible governance or democratic-discourse outcome. Considering how conceptually broad the exposure and outcome domains are, these criteria should be stated very precisely. I suggest adding a formal eligibility table with operational definitions and examples of what was included and excluded.

Some interpretation goes beyond what the underlying designs can reasonably establish. The manuscript says the convergence across studies suggests the relationships are “relatively robust,” although the authors themselves acknowledge wide differences in rigor and comparability. This wording is too strong when much of the evidence consists of qualitative/discourse analysis, policy/document analysis, grey literature, and other designs that may identify patterns but cannot establish effect strength or causal relationships. The manuscript should distinguish clearly between studies that document an association, interpret a discourse, describe a mechanism, or test an effect. At present, these different levels of evidence are sometimes treated together.



The quality appraisal is mentioned, but its results are practically invisible in the synthesis. The manuscript states that MMAT and AACODS were used and that appraisal findings determined the “weight given to each source during synthesis.” However, I cannot see how this weighting actually occurred. There are no quality-appraisal results by study, no distribution of stronger versus weaker evidence, and no example showing that a conclusion was modified because the supporting studies were weaker. Therefore, the statement that quality influenced the synthesis cannot presently be verified. The authors need to present appraisal results and demonstrate explicitly how methodological quality affected interpretation.

The manuscript does not provide the documentary evidence expected from a review containing 103 studies. The reference section presently contains only a small group of methodological and conceptual references, such as Wardle and Derakhshan, Bradshaw and Howard, Ong and Cabañes, PRISMA, MMAT, and AACODS. This creates a serious transparency problem because readers cannot identify the actual 103 studies forming the evidence base. At minimum, the complete included-study bibliography should appear in the references or supplementary material, and each study should have an identifier that can be connected to the extraction table, appraisal results, and thematic synthesis.

Please indicate your recommendation by checking the appropriate box below.

<u>Decision</u>	
	Accept the manuscript for publication.
/	Reconsider the manuscript after the authors have satisfactorily addressed and complied with the reviewers' comments and recommendations.
	Reject the manuscript, as it is not suitable for publication.

SECOND ROUND

<u>Decision</u>	<u>Editor</u>	<u>Reviewer 1</u>	<u>Reviewer 2</u>
Accept the manuscript for publication.	/	/	/
Reconsider the manuscript after the authors have satisfactorily addressed and complied with the reviewers' comments and recommendations.			
Reject the manuscript, as it is not suitable for publication.			