

# Exposure without Belief: Mapping Awareness–Acceptance Gaps in Indonesian Political Controversies

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**Zakky Zidan\***

*Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia*

**Idris Hemay**

*Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia*

## ABSTRACT

Digital political controversies can spread widely without being equally believed, creating a gap between public exposure and public endorsement. This study examines whether awareness of political and governance issues in Indonesia translates into acceptance, and where the largest divergences occur. It analyses aggregated results from a national telephone survey of 1,286 respondents conducted on 17–20 May 2025. Awareness is defined as self-reported recognition of an issue, while acceptance refers to the paired survey evaluation: belief in an allegation, confidence in case resolution, satisfaction with institutional performance, or agreement with policy proposals. The study calculates awareness–acceptance gaps and compares patterns across political support, demographic, regional, and media-access groups. The findings show that awareness and acceptance often diverge. A prominent factual allegation produces the largest positive gap, indicating high awareness but limited belief, while several policy and performance items show acceptance exceeding awareness. Belief is also concentrated in specific political constituencies and information environments. The study argues that visibility is a poor proxy for persuasion and offers a transparent method for analysing published survey tabulations when individual-level data are unavailable.

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\* Corresponding author:

Dimas Subekti

Department of Social and Political Science, Universitas Jambi, Jambi, Indonesia.

Email: [dimassubekti05@unja.ac.id](mailto:dimassubekti05@unja.ac.id)

**Keywords**

Acceptance, agenda-setting, misperceptions, motivated reasoning, public opinion, selective exposure, trust

**INTRODUCTION**

The contemporary information environment has made political communication faster, cheaper, and more scalable. At the same time, it has made democratic publics more vulnerable to false and misleading content. The central concern is not simply that misinformation circulates, but that it can distort how citizens evaluate political actors, public institutions, and policy performance. Lazer et al. (2018) define fake news as fabricated information that imitates the form of legitimate news while lacking its editorial norms and verification practices. They also argue that the problem requires a multidisciplinary social-science agenda rather than a narrow focus on media ethics. This matters because misinformation is not merely “bad content.” It is shaped by platform incentives, algorithmic amplification, political competition, and shifting patterns of public trust.

Yet the strongest empirical research cautions against assuming that misinformation uniformly dominates everyday media consumption. Allen et al. (2020) show that news occupies only a limited share of total media use and that fake news exposure represents a small fraction of overall media consumption. However, small average exposure can conceal strong concentration. Grinberg et al. (2019) find that exposure to and sharing of fake news sources on Twitter during the 2016 U.S. election were concentrated among a small fraction of users. Similarly, Guess, Nyhan, and Reifler (2020) show that visits to untrustworthy websites were not universal but patterned by political preference and platform pathways. These studies suggest that misinformation should be understood not only as a content problem, but also as a distributional problem: who encounters it, who engages with it, and how these patterns map onto political divisions.

This distributional problem is especially relevant in Indonesia, where digital politics is closely tied to identity, polarization, and organized amplification. Lim (2017) shows how Indonesian social media can produce “algorithmic enclaves” that intensify group-based antagonism and reinforce

tribal forms of nationalism. In such an environment, exposure to political controversy may be widespread, while interpretation remains segmented by networks, influencers, partisan identities, and selective circulation. This motivates a central distinction in this article: being aware of a political claim is not the same as accepting it as true. Even behavioral indicators such as sharing do not necessarily indicate belief. Pennycook et al. (2021) show that headline veracity has a weaker effect on sharing intentions than on accuracy judgments, suggesting that circulation and belief can diverge.

Explaining this divergence requires attention to how citizens process political information under conflict and uncertainty. A major framework in political psychology is motivated reasoning, which argues that people's goals, especially the desire to defend prior attitudes or identities, shape how they process new information (Kunda 1990). Classic research on biased assimilation shows that individuals evaluate mixed evidence asymmetrically, accepting congenial evidence more readily while scrutinizing uncongenial evidence more harshly (Lord, Ross, and Lepper 1979). Taber and Lodge (2006) extend this argument to political judgment through the concept of motivated scepticism, in which citizens counterargue dissonant claims, accept supportive claims more easily, and seek confirmatory information. Lodge and Taber (2013) further argue that political judgment is often shaped by automatic affective and associative processes, with conscious reasoning frequently serving as post hoc rationalization.

However, motivated reasoning is not the only mechanism relevant to misinformation. Another body of work emphasizes limited analytic engagement and insufficient attention to accuracy. Pennycook and Rand (2019) argue that susceptibility to false headlines is often better explained by lack of reasoning than by partisan bias alone. Tappin, Pennycook, and Rand (2020) also caution that it is methodologically difficult to distinguish politically biased processing from other forms of belief updating. Platform interventions further complicate the issue. Pennycook et al. (2020) show that when only some content is labelled false, unlabelled content may appear more accurate through an implied-truth effect. These studies suggest that acceptance of misinformation may be shaped by both

directional motivations, such as identity-protective reasoning, and non-directional constraints, such as limited attention, weak reflection, and uneven credibility cues.

Despite these advances, two practical gaps remain for research on fast-moving political controversies in Indonesia. First, much of the strongest misinformation research relies on behavioural trace data or individual-level survey microdata that allow researchers to model who is exposed to misinformation, who believes it, and why (Allen et al. 2020; Grinberg et al. 2019; Guess, Nyhan, and Reifler 2020). In many political settings, however, scholars, journalists, and the public often rely on published survey releases, including topline and crosstabs. These releases are frequently cited in public debate but are rarely analysed systematically with clear concepts, transparent metrics, and carefully limited claims. Second, many descriptive accounts collapse two analytically distinct outcomes: whether citizens have heard about a claim and whether they accept it as credible. This distinction matters because exposure is shaped by salience, network structure, and platform visibility, whereas acceptance is shaped by motivated reasoning, credibility judgments, institutional trust, and attention to accuracy cues (Kunda 1990; Lazer et al. 2018; Lim 2017; Taber and Lodge 2006).

This article addresses these gaps by conceptualizing and operationalizing an “awareness–acceptance gap” as a descriptive indicator of selective credibility in public opinion. The gap is defined as the difference, in percentage points, between the share of respondents who report awareness of a political claim or issue and the share who judge it to be believable or otherwise acceptable, as reported in a national survey release. When awareness substantially exceeds acceptance, public attention does not translate into broad belief, suggesting scepticism, contestation, or credibility constraints. When the gap is smaller, acceptance tracks awareness more closely, indicating stronger persuasive cues or weaker resistance. This measure does not identify individual-level causal mechanisms. Rather, it provides a transparent mapping tool for analysing divergence between exposure and endorsement when only published tabulations are available.

The analysis is guided by three research questions. First, how large are awareness–acceptance gaps across the major political controversies and governance issues documented in the survey release? Second, how do these gaps vary across demographic, political, and media-consumption segments for which crosstabs are reported? This question is important because prior research shows that misinformation-related engagement is often concentrated in particular groups (Grinberg et al. 2019; Guess, Nyhan, and Reifler 2020). Third, to what extent do segment-level differences in acceptance co-vary with institutional trust and media pathways, insofar as these measures are available in the published tables? These questions are descriptive but theory-informed. They are designed to identify patterns that can be interpreted through motivated reasoning, selective credibility, and attention-based accounts without overstating what aggregate survey data can prove.

The study makes three contributions. Conceptually, it clarifies the difference between exposure and acceptance and treats their divergence as a measurable feature of public opinion rather than an anecdotal observation. Empirically, it maps the distribution of awareness–acceptance gaps across issues and segments in a national survey release, providing systematic evidence for debates that often rely on selective topline figures. Methodologically, it shows how published survey tabulations can be analysed transparently and responsibly when individual-level data are unavailable. The unit of analysis is the segment reported in crosstabs, not the individual respondent; findings are framed as descriptive co-variation rather than causal inference; and limitations are made explicit, including ecological inference risks and the inability to estimate multivariate models or uncertainty parameters without microdata (Tappin, Pennycook, and Rand 2020).

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. The next section explains the data source, measures, and analytic strategy, including the construction of awareness–acceptance gaps from published tables. The findings section reports the distribution of gaps across issues and segments and examines co-variation with institutional trust and media pathways where available. The discussion interprets these patterns in relation to

motivated reasoning and accuracy-attention accounts, while emphasizing that policy responses cannot rely simply on increasing exposure. Cross-cutting contact can intensify polarization in some settings (Bail et al. 2018), and selective labelling can create unintended credibility cues through implied-truth effects (Pennycook et al. 2020).

## **METHODS**

This study employs a secondary analysis of a publicly released national opinion survey report. Using published topline and cross-tabulations as data, the analysis is descriptive and theory-informed: it maps patterns of issue awareness and acceptance (belief) across issues and respondent segments, without estimating individual-level causal effects. Survey data remain a major source of evidence in the social sciences, while secondary-data research requires explicit attention to missing information and documentation of what is and is not available in the source material (Sturgis and Luff 2021; Diatta and Berchtold 2023).

The empirical basis is the Indikator Politik Indonesia survey release dated 27 May 2025, based on telephone interviews conducted 17–20 May 2025 (N = 1,286). The report provides topline estimates and crosstabs for selected political controversies, institutional evaluations, and information-source measures. Because the study relies on published tables rather than microdata, the unit of analysis is the segment/category reported in each crosstab (e.g., demographic or political group), not individuals.

Two core constructs are derived from the published tables. Awareness (exposure) is operationalized as the percentage of respondents who report having heard about or being aware of a given issue/claim (as defined in each survey item). Acceptance (belief) is operationalized as the percentage who judge the claim/issue to be believable (or the closest available acceptance metric in the release). The primary descriptive indicator is the awareness–acceptance gap (AAG), calculated as:  $AAG = \text{Awareness (\%)} - \text{Acceptance (\%)}$  in percentage points. A larger AAG indicates high salience but limited acceptance, consistent with selective credibility or skepticism; a smaller AAG indicates that acceptance tracks awareness more closely. Because

the release pairs each issue with the closest available acceptance item—belief in an allegation, agreement with a proposal, or evaluations such as confidence or satisfaction—acceptance is intentionally item-specific rather than a single standardized construct. Accordingly, AAG is used here as a pragmatic descriptive mapping tool to identify where issue recognition and endorsement diverge under the constraints of aggregated tabulations, not as a cross-issue scale of persuasion.

All relevant topline and crosstabs were manually extracted from the report into a structured spreadsheet, preserving the original category labels, denominators (where reported), and response options. When tables included non-substantive responses (e.g., “don’t know/refuse”), these were recorded as provided and not redistributed across substantive categories. The extraction protocol was designed to maximize reproducibility under conditions of “missing information,” where key analytic elements (e.g., individual responses, full coding, and variance estimates) are not accessible (Diatta and Berchtold 2023).

Analysis proceeds in three steps. First, overall AAGs are computed for each issue and ranked to identify high-gap versus low-gap issues. Second, AAGs are computed within available segments to describe heterogeneity in exposure and acceptance patterns. Third, where the release provides measures of institutional trust and/or primary information sources, segment-level co-variation between acceptance and these indicators is described. Findings are presented as descriptive associations at the segment level and interpreted cautiously to avoid ecological inference errors (Gnaldi, Tomaselli, and Forcina 2018).

The study uses aggregated, publicly available statistics and contains no identifiable personal data. Method-bound limitations include: inability to estimate multivariate models or uncertainty measures without microdata; potential ecological fallacy when interpreting segment-level patterns (Gnaldi, Tomaselli, and Forcina 2018); and limited capacity to assess nonresponse bias directly. While response propensities are a standard framework for diagnosing representativeness, such diagnostics require auxiliary variables and microdata that are unavailable here (Bethlehem 2020; Struminskaya and Gummer 2022).

RESULTS

Overall Awareness and Acceptance Across Issues

Table 1 summarizes issue-level awareness, issue-specific acceptance, and the awareness–acceptance gap (AAG). Awareness is the share of respondents who report having heard about each issue. Acceptance uses the paired Indikator item: confidence investigators can resolve corruption cases; satisfaction with the Attorney General’s Office (Duta Palma); agreement with KUHAP provisions; and belief the fake diploma allegation is true (Indikator Politik Indonesia 2025). Because acceptance targets differ (belief, agreement, and performance evaluation), it is not treated as a single latent construct. AAG should therefore be read as an issue-level alignment statistic for pattern classification, not as a direct cross-issue scale. “Exposure without belief” is most appropriate for contested factual allegations measured with belief items, while negative AAG values typically reflect evaluative stances despite low recognition of the issue label. In other words, it indicates whether high visibility co-occurs with endorsement, confidence, satisfaction, or belief, given the survey’s paired awareness and acceptance items.

Table 1. Awareness, Acceptance, and AAG by Issue (Overall)

| Issues                                                                                    | Awareness (%) | Acceptance (%) | AAG (points) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|
| Alleged fake diploma case (belief allegation is true)                                     | 75.9          | 19.1           | 56.8         |
| Pertamina corruption case (confidence AGO can resolve)                                    | 70.5          | 52.8           | 17.7         |
| Arrest of Head of South Jakarta District Court (confidence AGO can resolve)               | 43.8          | 47.0           | -3.2         |
| Alleged bribery of former Supreme Court official Zarof Ricar (confidence AGO can resolve) | 36.5          | 42.7           | -6.2         |
| Duta Palma corruption and money laundering (satisfaction with AGO performance) *          | 30.7          | 58.3           | -27.6        |

Table 1. (Continued)

|                                                                                                               |      |      |       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|-------|
| LPEI corruption case (confidence<br>KPK can resolve)                                                          | 23.3 | 46.1 | -22.8 |
| KUHAP revision debate<br>(awareness item) paired with:<br>restorative resolution proposal<br>(agreement)**    | 25.4 | 60.5 | -35.1 |
| KUHAP revision debate<br>(awareness item) paired with:<br>restriction on live trial coverage<br>(agreement)** | 25.4 | 51.1 | -25.7 |

Source: Author’s compilation and calculations from Indikator Politik Indonesia, national telephone survey release (17–20 May 2025; n = 1,286).

Note: AAG = Awareness – Acceptance (percentage points).

\* Acceptance = “very satisfied + somewhat satisfied” with the Attorney General’s Office’s results in the Duta Palma case (Indikator Politik Indonesia 2025, 32).

\*\* Acceptance = “strongly agree + agree” with the KUHAP proposal (Indikator Politik Indonesia 2025, 35–37).

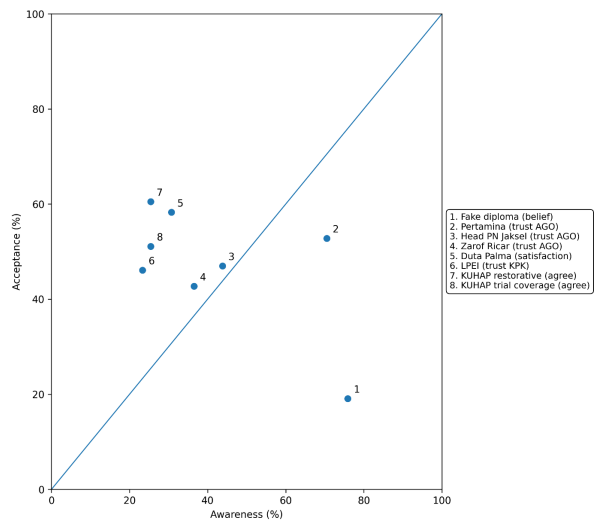


Figure 1. Awareness versus Acceptance Across Issues

Source: Author’s visualization based on Indikator Politik Indonesia’s national telephone survey release (17–20 May 2025; n = 1,286).

Note: Each point represents one issue in Table 1. The x-axis reports awareness (share reporting they have heard of the issue) and the y-axis reports issue-specific acceptance (belief, confidence, satisfaction, or agreement; see Table 1). The 45° line indicates equality (awareness = acceptance). Points below the line indicate positive AAG (Awareness – Acceptance > 0), and points above the line indicate negative AAG (Awareness – Acceptance < 0).

Figure 1 plots the awareness–acceptance pairs from Table 1. The visual pattern underscores that awareness and acceptance do not move in lockstep across issues. Two cases sit clearly in a “high-exposure/low-acceptance” region: the alleged fake diploma claim (high awareness, low belief) and, to a lesser extent, the Pertamina corruption case (high awareness, more moderate confidence). In contrast, several items produce negative AAG values, meaning acceptance exceeds awareness. This occurs most sharply for the KUHAP proposals (low awareness of the policy debate but majority agreement with the proposed provisions) and the Duta Palma satisfaction item (relatively low case awareness but higher satisfaction with outcomes).

Substantively, Table 1 shows that the public information environment can generate very high issue recognition without corresponding belief or endorsement. The clearest instance is the alleged fake diploma claim: although 75.9% report awareness, only 19.1% endorse the allegation, yielding a large positive AAG of 56.8 points (Indikator Politik Indonesia 2025). This descriptive configuration is consistent with evidence that exposure to misinformation can be limited or highly concentrated and that exposure does not map mechanically onto belief (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017; Allen et al. 2020). It is also consistent with work showing that exposure and sharing of low-quality information are unevenly distributed across audiences (Guess, Nagler, and Tucker 2019; Grinberg et al. 2019).

For corruption-law enforcement items, awareness varies substantially across cases, ranging from 70.5% (Pertamina) down to 23.3% (LPEI), while confidence in law enforcement’s ability to resolve cases sits in a narrower band (42.7%–52.8%) when measured on the “all respondents” series reported by Indikator (Indikator Politik Indonesia 2025). This produces modest positive AAG for Pertamina but small negative AAG for some other

cases. The Duta Palma item is distinct because acceptance is framed as satisfaction with outcomes rather than confidence in investigative capacity; here, satisfaction (58.3%) exceeds awareness (30.7%), yielding a negative AAG (Indikator Politik Indonesia 2025). These negative gaps should not be read as “acceptance without information” in a literal sense. Rather, they indicate that respondents can express general trust or approval even if they did not report awareness of the specific news story, a well-known feature of survey measurement when issue recognition and evaluative judgments are asked as separate items.

The KUHAP items illustrate this point most clearly. Only 25.4% report awareness that the government and parliament are discussing KUHAP revisions, yet majorities agree with specific proposals (60.5% for the restorative-resolution proposal; 51.1% for restricting live trial coverage), producing large negative AAG values (Indikator Politik Indonesia 2025). In terms of the paper’s measurement logic, these are “low exposure/high acceptance” configurations: public support for particular provisions is not conditional on recognizing the KUHAP debate as an issue label. This distinction matters for interpretation of Figure 1: some points fall above the diagonal because acceptance is closer to a general normative or institutional evaluation than a belief in a factual claim. The core analytic interest of this paper is therefore concentrated on issues where acceptance corresponds to belief endorsement of a contested allegation—precisely the configuration where “exposure without belief” is most theoretically meaningful for misinformation research (Pennycook and Rand 2019; Pennycook, Cannon, and Rand 2018).

### **The Largest Gap: High-Exposure/Low-Acceptance Issues**

Table 2 highlights the issues with the largest awareness–acceptance divergence in absolute terms, using the AAG values from Table 1. Reporting the absolute divergence is useful because it identifies the most pronounced mismatches between exposure and endorsement, while the sign indicates whether the mismatch is “exposure without acceptance” (positive AAG) or “acceptance exceeding exposure” (negative AAG).

Table 2. Top Issues with the Largest Awareness–Acceptance Divergence (absolute AAG)

| Rank | Issue                                                 | Awareness (%) | Acceptance (%) | AAG (points) | Absolute AAG |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1    | Alleged fake diploma case (belief allegation is true) | 75.9          | 19.1           | 56.8         | 56.8         |
| 2    | KUHAP restorative-resolution proposal (agreement)     | 25.4          | 60.5           | -35.1        | 35.1         |
| 3    | Duta Palma case (satisfaction with AGO performance)   | 30.7          | 58.3           | -27.6        | 27.6         |
| 4    | KUHAP restriction on live trial coverage (agreement)  | 25.4          | 51.1           | -25.7        | 25.7         |
| 5    | LPEI case (confidence KPK can resolve)                | 23.3          | 46.1           | -22.8        | 22.8         |

Source: Author’s compilation and calculations from Indikator Politik Indonesia, national telephone survey release (17–20 May 2025; n = 1,286).

Note: AAG = Awareness – Acceptance (percentage points). Absolute AAG ranks the magnitude of divergence; the sign indicates direction (positive = awareness exceeds acceptance; negative = acceptance exceeds awareness).

One issue clearly stands out as the main “high exposure/low acceptance” case: the alleged fake diploma claim. Its high awareness combined with low belief produces the largest positive AAG in the dataset. This matters descriptively because it signals a large separation between public visibility and belief endorsement—an empirical signature often emphasized in the misinformation literature, where broad circulation does not automatically translate into widespread credence (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017; Allen et al. 2020). The configuration is also consistent with experimental evidence

that repeated exposure can increase perceived accuracy for some claims (illusory truth), yet belief remains contingent on attention, context, and individual differences rather than exposure alone (Pennycook, Cannon, and Rand 2018; Pennycook and Rand 2019). Importantly, these results do not infer mechanisms; they identify which issue most strongly displays exposure without belief in the released tabulations.

The remaining large divergences in Table 2 are negative AAG cases, indicating that acceptance exceeds awareness. In the Indikator release, these are driven by KUHAP proposals and satisfaction/trust items, where respondents can express agreement or performance evaluations even if they did not report recognizing the specific issue label. This distinction reinforces the value of separating “awareness” from “acceptance” analytically: the gap metric reveals when issue visibility and endorsement align versus when they diverge sharply, and the direction of the divergence helps classify whether a given issue is primarily an “exposure without belief” case (positive AAG) or an “endorsement beyond reported recognition” case (negative AAG). In the broader research agenda, such mapping helps clarify where persuasion concerns are most plausibly concentrated—especially for contested factual allegations—versus where endorsement reflects broader institutional or normative orientations (Guess, Nyhan, and Reifler 2020) .

### **Segment Differences in AAG (Who Is “Exposed but Sceptical” vs “Exposed and Accepting”)**

Table 3 examines how the awareness–acceptance gap varies across key segments for the issue where “acceptance” is most directly comparable to misinformation belief: the alleged fake diploma claim. Acceptance is defined as the share who believe the allegation (“strongly believe” + “believe”). Across nearly all segments, awareness is high while belief remains substantially lower, producing large positive AAG values (Indikator Politik Indonesia 2025). This configuration is consistent with prior evidence that misinformation exposure and engagement can be highly uneven, while belief in encountered false stories is not universal (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017; Allen et al. 2020; Grinberg et al. 2019).

Table 3. Awareness, Belief (Acceptance), and AAG by Segment — Alleged Fake Diploma Claim

| Segment                           | Awareness (%) | Belief / Acceptance (%) | AAG (points) |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Gender: Male                      | 83.0          | 24.1                    | 58.9         |
| Gender: Female                    | 68.9          | 14.1                    | 54.8         |
| Education: ≤Primary (≤SD)         | 71.1          | 20.5                    | 50.6         |
| Education: Senior HS (SLTA)       | 80.1          | 17.8                    | 62.3         |
| Education: College                | 81.8          | 16.9                    | 64.9         |
| Residence: Rural                  | 71.2          | 17.6                    | 53.6         |
| Residence: Urban                  | 80.8          | 20.6                    | 60.2         |
| Region: Central Java–DIY          | 85.1          | 12.9                    | 72.2         |
| Region: Banten                    | 69.8          | 29.1                    | 40.7         |
| Pilpres 2024 base: Anies–Muhaimin | 83.8          | 40.2                    | 43.6         |
| Pilpres 2024 base: Prabowo–Gibran | 74.8          | 15.2                    | 59.6         |
| Pilpres 2024 base: Ganjar–Mahfud  | 84.2          | 20.6                    | 63.6         |

Source: Author’s compilation and calculations from Indikator Politik Indonesia, national telephone survey release (17–20 May 2025; n = 1,286), segment tabulations for the alleged fake diploma item.

Note: Acceptance is operationalized as the share who “strongly believe” or “believe” the allegation. AAG = Awareness – Acceptance (percentage points).

Several descriptive contrasts stand out. First, demographic variation is present but does not change the overall structure: both men and women display large gaps between awareness and belief. Second, by education, awareness rises from primary to college while belief does not increase in parallel, producing larger AAG values at higher education levels. This pattern is descriptively compatible with accounts emphasizing that susceptibility to misinformation is often better explained by limited attention and low discernment than by uniform partisan bias, though the present release does not test mechanisms (Pennycook and Rand 2019). It is also consistent with evidence that repeated exposure can raise perceived accuracy for some people (the illusory truth effect) without implying that belief becomes widespread (Pennycook, Cannon, and Rand 2018).

Third, political segmentation is pronounced. The Anies–Muhaimin base reports markedly higher belief (40.2%) than the Prabowo–Gibran base (15.2%) and the Ganjar–Mahfud base (20.6), resulting in a smaller AAG for the Anies base despite similarly high awareness. This indicates that belief endorsement is more concentrated than awareness along political lines in this case (Indikator Politik Indonesia 2025). Such concentration parallels findings from other contexts in which engagement with low-quality or untrustworthy information is unevenly distributed and clustered within specific communities (Grinberg et al. 2019; Guess, Nagler, and Tucker 2019). In addition, research on exposure to untrustworthy websites during election periods shows that the audience for such sources can be limited on average yet highly concentrated among smaller groups of users (Guess, Nyhan, and Reifler 2020; Allcott and Gentzkow 2017). The results here remain descriptive: they document where belief is more prevalent, not why it is more prevalent.

Finally, regional contrasts further underscore heterogeneity in the gap. Central Java–DIY combines very high awareness with especially low belief (large AAG), whereas Banten shows a smaller gap driven by higher belief. These differences reinforce the value of mapping awareness and belief separately: a single national average can conceal substantial dispersion across segments.

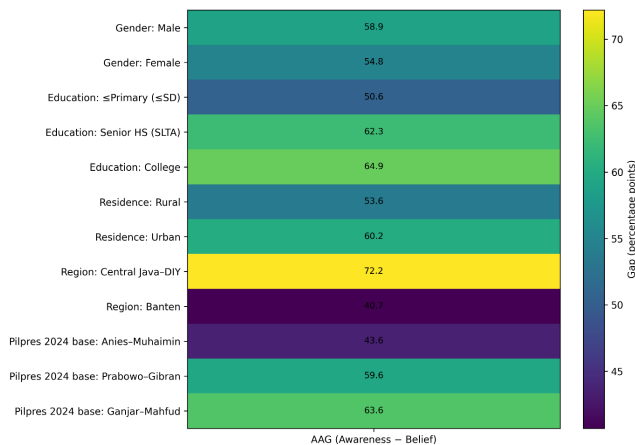


Figure 2. Segment-Level Awareness–Acceptance Gaps (AAG) for the Alleged Fake Diploma Claim (Heatmap).

Source: Author’s visualization based on segment-level tabulations from Indikator Politik Indonesia’s national telephone survey release (17–20 May 2025; n = 1,286).

Note: Cells report AAG = Awareness – Acceptance (percentage points), where Acceptance is the share who “strongly believe” or “believe” the allegation (see Table 3). Darker shading indicates larger positive gaps (awareness exceeds belief). If negative values are present, indicate them with a distinct shading and label accordingly.

**Descriptive Co-Variation with Information Sources (Media Access)**

Result 4 reports patterns by media access for the same claim (alleged fake diploma) to assess whether the exposure–belief relationship varies across information environments. Table 4 combines each medium’s population share (“base”) with awareness and belief within that access group. The key descriptive result is strong dispersion: some media-access groups exhibit very high awareness paired with very low belief (large AAG), while others show comparatively higher belief given high awareness (Indikator Politik Indonesia 2025).

Table 4. Awareness, Belief (Acceptance), and AAG by Media Access — Alleged Fake Diploma Claim

| Media access (last month) | Base (%) | Awareness (%) | Belief (%) | AAG  |
|---------------------------|----------|---------------|------------|------|
| Television                | 48.2     | 79.3          | 18.3       | 61.0 |
| TikTok                    | 32.7     | 82.6          | 21.8       | 60.8 |
| Facebook                  | 31.3     | 78.6          | 22.0       | 56.6 |
| YouTube                   | 26.1     | 87.8          | 27.3       | 60.5 |
| Instagram                 | 21.9     | 79.4          | 20.8       | 58.6 |
| Online news portals       | 16.3     | 87.3          | 14.3       | 73.0 |
| WhatsApp                  | 8.1      | 81.9          | 31.9       | 50.0 |
| Twitter/X                 | 6.1      | 80.4          | 44.1       | 36.3 |

Source: Author’s compilation and calculations from Indikator Politik Indonesia, national telephone survey release (17–20 May 2025; n = 1,286), media-access tabulations for the alleged fake diploma item (Indikator Politik Indonesia 2025, 53–54).

Note: Base is the share reporting access to each source in the last month. Awareness and belief are computed within each media-access subgroup. Acceptance is operationalized as “strongly believe” + “believe.”  $AAG = \text{Awareness} - \text{Acceptance}$  (percentage points). Media categories are not mutually exclusive (bases may sum to more than 100).

Two patterns are particularly salient. First, several high-reach sources (television, TikTok, YouTube) are associated with high awareness but comparatively low belief, yielding large AAG values. Second, the smallest AAG appears among Twitter/X users, where belief is substantially higher (44.1%) despite similarly high awareness. WhatsApp users also report relatively high belief (31.9%) compared to most other sources. These differences do not identify causal effects of platforms. They should instead be read alongside prior work showing that false news can diffuse differently from true news and that exposure to low-quality content is often concentrated among a subset of users (Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral 2018; Allen et al. 2020; Grinberg et al. 2019).

The cross-channel dispersion is also compatible with research suggesting that belief and sharing can be partially decoupled and shaped by attention and contextual cues. Accuracy-focused prompts can reduce willingness to share misinformation without requiring large changes in exposure, implying that differences in information environments may matter through attention and evaluation processes (Pennycook et al. 2021). Related experimental work shows that partial warning labels can create unintended inference patterns (the implied truth effect), which is relevant for interpreting why high awareness does not necessarily translate into high belief even in heavily exposed environments (Pennycook et al. 2020). Moreover, evidence that correction timing affects subsequent judgments underscores why a purely exposure-based interpretation would be incomplete—even though such mechanisms are not directly measured in the Indikator release (Brashier et al. 2021).

Because belief is often intertwined with broader trust and verification practices, it is also relevant that trust in institutions can condition how people handle unverified information in diverse settings, including public health crises and platform environments (Vinck et al. 2019; van Zoonen,

Luoma-aho, and Lievonon 2024). The present release does not provide a unified microdata framework to test mediation between trust and media access; therefore, the Results claim remains descriptive: belief levels differ across media-access groups even when awareness is consistently high.

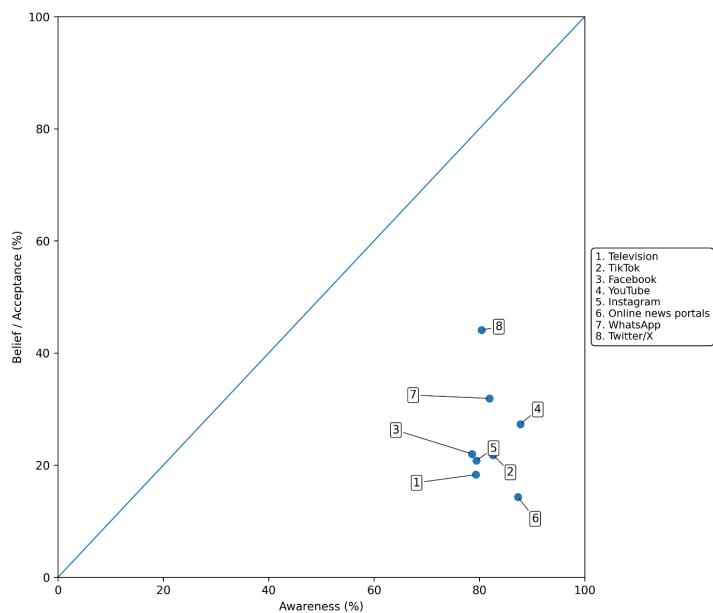


Figure 3. Awareness Versus Belief by Media Access (Issue-Level Scatter Plot, Alleged Fake Diploma Claim).

Source: Author’s visualization based on Indikator Politik Indonesia’s national telephone survey release (17–20 May 2025; n = 1,286).

Note: Each point represents a media-access group in Table 4. The x-axis reports awareness of the alleged fake diploma issue and the y-axis reports belief endorsement. The 45-degree reference line indicates equal awareness and belief. Points below the line indicate larger positive gaps (high awareness relative to belief).

As a compact check, the main conclusions are unchanged if the gap metric (AAG) is replaced by a conditional measure such as the acceptance-to-awareness ratio (belief/awareness). The media-access groups that appear relatively “more accepting given awareness” (Twitter/X and WhatsApp)

remain so, and the group that appears most “exposed but sceptical” (online news portals) remains the clearest outlier. This stability indicates that the descriptive classification of environments with larger versus smaller exposure–belief separation is not driven solely by the choice of AAG as the summary metric. Measurement differences across studies remain important—self-reported awareness differs from trace-based exposure—and URL-logged trace data can face systematic biases due to ephemerality and inaccessible content (Dahlke et al. 2025).

## DISCUSSION

This study’s central contribution is to show that exposure and endorsement should be treated as distinct stages of public opinion formation. Across the issues reported in the Indikator Politik Indonesia survey release, high awareness does not automatically translate into acceptance. The clearest case is the alleged fake diploma claim: awareness is widespread, but belief remains a minority position, producing the largest positive awareness–acceptance gap (AAG). Segment and media-access tabulations further show that belief is not evenly distributed. Instead, it is concentrated in particular political constituencies and information environments. These findings support three main claims: visibility is not the same as impact, belief is socially and politically concentrated, and acceptance is shaped by filters of trust, identity, and attention.

### Visibility Is Not Impact

The first implication is that misinformation visibility should not be equated with persuasion. Contemporary misinformation research increasingly cautions against assuming that false or misleading claims inevitably produce mass belief or large-scale behavioral effects. Evidence is often more heterogeneous than public debate suggests (Adams et al. 2023). The Indonesian evidence is consistent with this more cautious view. The alleged fake diploma claim was widely recognized, but most respondents did not endorse it as true. Thus, what appears highly salient in public discourse may still fail to become broadly persuasive at the level of belief.

This finding aligns with studies showing that misinformation exposure is often limited, uneven, or concentrated rather than universal (Allen et al. 2020; Grinberg et al. 2019; Guess, Nyhan, and Reifler 2020). It also fits work arguing that misinformation should not be assessed only by circulation or visibility, because engagement, sharing, and belief can diverge (Pennycook and Rand 2021). In the present study, a large AAG does not mean the claim is irrelevant. Rather, it shows that public visibility and public endorsement follow different logics. A claim can become widely known while remaining contested, doubted, or rejected by most citizens.

This distinction also matters for interpreting misinformation harms. A belief-focused measure may understate other possible effects, such as uncertainty, cynicism, or reduced trust. Research on synthetic political media, for example, suggests that exposure can increase uncertainty and reduce trust even when people are not fully deceived (Vaccari and Chadwick 2020). Therefore, the alleged fake diploma case should not be dismissed simply because belief is limited. Its importance lies in showing that high visibility can coexist with low endorsement, while still contributing to a contested and uncertain information environment.

### **Belief Is Concentrated**

The second claim is that belief is concentrated rather than evenly distributed. The segment-level results show that awareness of the alleged fake diploma claim is high across many groups, but belief varies substantially by political base, region, gender, education, and media access. This pattern is difficult to reconcile with a model of the public as uniformly gullible. It is also insufficient to describe the public as uniformly skeptical. Instead, the findings suggest selective endorsement: many citizens recognize the claim without accepting it, while some groups are more likely to treat it as credible.

This pattern is consistent with research showing that resilience to online disinformation varies across political and media systems (Humprecht, Esser, and Van Aelst 2020) and that conspiratorial beliefs are associated with ideological extremity, distrust, and political grievance (Sutton and Douglas 2020). In the Indonesian data, political segmentation is especially

important. Belief in the alleged fake diploma claim is higher among one electoral base than others, even though awareness is broadly high. This does not prove motivated reasoning at the individual level, because the study relies on aggregated tabulations rather than microdata. However, it is consistent with identity-based accounts in which politically congenial claims are more likely to be accepted, while identity-incongruent claims receive greater skepticism (Kunda 1990; Van Bavel and Pereira 2018).

Media-access patterns point in the same direction. Some groups, such as online news portal users, show very high awareness but low belief. Others, such as Twitter/X and WhatsApp users, show higher belief given awareness. These differences should not be interpreted as causal platform effects, since media categories are not mutually exclusive and the data are descriptive. Still, they indicate that information environments differ not only in reach but also in the credibility cues, peer norms, and interpretive contexts through which claims are evaluated.

### **Trust, Identity, and Attention as Filters**

The third claim is that exposure becomes acceptance only when filtered through trust, identity, and attention. Awareness appears to reflect the reach of an issue in the public information environment. Acceptance, by contrast, depends on how citizens evaluate the claim. This two-stage interpretation helps explain why awareness can be high across groups while belief remains concentrated.

Trust is one likely filter. Conspiracy-belief research links endorsement of doubtful claims to institutional distrust, uncertainty, and political grievance (Mari et al. 2022; Sutton and Douglas 2020). In the Indonesian case, higher belief in some segments may reflect not only exposure to the claim but also lower trust in relevant institutions or stronger suspicion toward political actors associated with the controversy. Because the survey release does not provide respondent-level data, this mechanism cannot be directly tested. It is best treated as a theoretically plausible interpretation.

Identity is another filter. Motivated reasoning research shows that individuals often process political information in ways that protect prior attitudes, group attachments, or political identities (Kunda 1990; Taber and

Lodge 2006). The present findings are compatible with this view because belief is politically patterned rather than randomly distributed. However, the evidence does not establish that respondents consciously reasoned in a partisan way. It shows only that belief varies across political constituencies in a way that motivated-reasoning theory helps interpret.

Attention is a third filter. Not all misinformation susceptibility is driven by partisan bias. Some research argues that false-belief endorsement often reflects insufficient analytic engagement or limited attention to accuracy (Pennycook and Rand 2019; Pennycook and Rand 2021). This is relevant because many respondents may recognize a claim without accepting it, while others may rely on familiarity, source cues, or repeated exposure. Studies on the illusory truth effect and implied-truth effects show that repeated exposure and partial labeling can influence perceived accuracy, even when people do not carefully evaluate the content (Pennycook, Cannon, and Rand 2018; Pennycook et al. 2020). The Indonesian results cannot test these mechanisms directly, but they show why exposure alone is an incomplete explanation.

## **Implications**

The practical implication is not that public communication should simply increase exposure to accurate information. For some issues, awareness is already high. The challenge is credibility: who is trusted, which cues are available, and how different groups interpret contested claims. Public communication should therefore prioritize clear evidence, credible messengers, and careful correction rather than repeated amplification of the allegation itself. Correction research shows that corrective interventions can reduce misperceptions, although effects vary by format and context and misinformation may continue to influence judgments after correction (Bode and Vraga 2018; Chan et al. 2017; Walter et al. 2020; Walter and Tukachinsky 2020). Experimental evidence also suggests that corrective factual information rarely produces the hypothesized backfire effect (Wood and Porter 2019).

Media literacy efforts should also focus less on exposure management and more on evaluative habits, such as source checking, accuracy

attention, and recognition of manipulation techniques. This implication is consistent with studies showing that accuracy prompts and inoculation-based interventions can improve resistance to misinformation (Basol, Roozenbeek, and van der Linden 2020; Pennycook et al. 2021; Roozenbeek and van der Linden 2019). However, these recommendations should be read as implications suggested by the findings, not as interventions tested in this study.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Several limitations qualify the interpretation. First, the study relies on a public survey release rather than respondent-level microdata. It therefore cannot estimate multivariate relationships, test mediation, or identify causal mechanisms linking media access, trust, identity, and belief. Second, “acceptance” varies across issues, including belief, confidence, satisfaction, and agreement. For this reason, the strongest interpretive claims concern the alleged fake diploma item, where acceptance directly measures belief in a contested allegation. Third, self-reported awareness is an imperfect proxy for exposure and cannot capture frequency, sequence, or source-specific intensity. Fourth, the survey is cross-sectional, so the analysis cannot determine whether belief is increasing or declining over time.

Despite these limits, the awareness–acceptance gap offers a useful descriptive tool for studying misinformation and public opinion when only published survey tabulations are available. It identifies when issue visibility and endorsement diverge, where belief is concentrated, and which patterns deserve further testing. Future research should use respondent-level microdata, longitudinal surveys, experiments, and behavioural trace data to examine whether selective scepticism, motivated evaluation, institutional trust, or attention-to-accuracy mechanisms best explain why exposure becomes acceptance for some citizens but not others.

### **CONCLUSION**

This article asked whether high issue visibility in a survey release translates into public endorsement and where the largest divergences

occur. The findings answer the three research questions directly. For RQ1, awareness–acceptance gap mapping shows that awareness and acceptance do not move in lockstep across political controversies and governance issues. The alleged fake diploma allegation produces the largest positive gap, indicating widespread public recognition but limited belief. For RQ2, the gaps are systematically patterned: belief endorsement is concentrated in specific political constituencies and varies across demographic and regional groups even when awareness remains broadly high. For RQ3, media-access tabulations show that belief differs across information environments, suggesting that exposure is filtered through credibility cues, trust orientations, and identity-consistent evaluation rather than simple contact with information.

The study’s main contribution is the awareness–acceptance gap framework, which turns published survey topline and crosstabs into a clear and replicable map of “exposure without belief” when respondent-level microdata are unavailable. This matters for misinformation research and democratic communication because it cautions against treating visibility, virality, or issue recognition as evidence of persuasion. The study is limited by its reliance on aggregated tables, which prevents multivariate testing and causal inference; by variation in what “acceptance” means across items; and by the use of self-reported awareness as an imperfect proxy for exposure. Future research should use respondent-level microdata, longitudinal designs across electoral cycles, and correction or inoculation experiments combined with behavioural trace data to test whether selective scepticism, motivated evaluation, or uncertainty-driven distrust best explains how exposure becomes endorsement.

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## Author Contributions

Zakky Zidan: Conceptualization, methodology, data curation, formal analysis, visualization, writing—original draft, and writing—review and editing.

Idris Hemay: Supervision, validation, and writing—review and editing.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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