

Networked Boycott Diplomacy: Mapping Multi-Actor Collaboration in Indonesia's Digital Foreign Policy Advocacy Against Israel

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ABSTRACT: Recent digital platforms have also changed the nature of citizen interaction within foreign policy, particularly as it concerns the Israel-Palestine conflict. This paper explores this debate in the case of online advocacy in Indonesia, highlighting the process of networked boycott diplomacy." In so doing, the state maintains its ceremonial posture in diplomatic forums, whilst a distributed, non-hierarchical network of state, semi-state, and non-state actors leverages social media to advance massive socio-economic boycotts to geo-economic effect. This research employs a qualitative netnographic approach through two datasets of Twitter (X) discourse spanning from January to December 2024. This study fills three important research gaps that stem from the existing literature: the absence of exhaustive mapping of multi-actor engagement in boycott movements; the insufficient theorization of the impact of decentralized digital networks on foreign policy at the level of the nation-state; and the lack of theoretical approaches that conceptualize the hybrid nature of socio-economic boycotts as tools of diplomacy. The results of our analysis demonstrate that the Indonesian digital boycott movement takes shape as a collaborative network of multiple actors, comprising organized interests (e.g., religious institutions, such as the Indonesian Ulema Council [MUI], and journalistic media) and ordinary citizens. Such decentralized connective action is a powerful enabler to mediate between state-centric diplomacy and collective public sentiment. Additionally, the socio-economic ramifications of such boycotts constitute a legitimate form of digital activism that serves as a hybrid diplomatic tool. This paper conceptualizes networked boycott diplomacy," creating a new framework that moves beyond existing paradigmatic notions of public diplomacy to illustrate how the domestic processes of digital mobilization become constitutive of international diplomatic petitions and formations.

KEYWORDS: Networked Boycott Diplomacy, Digital Advocacy, Boycott Movement, Indonesian Foreign Policy, Multi-Actor Collaboration.

I. INTRODUCTION

Digital technology has been the main driver of paradigm shifts in international relations: a flexible way to publicly support the core elements of sustainable diplomacy is by enabling actors to engage in a previously private, state-level domain. This digital evolution, in particular, has enabled new levels of transnational solidarity and citizen-led advocacy on membership issues, even regarding Israel–Palestine (Anderson, 2025; Chen & Tang, 2026; Nabila et al., 2025). As the country with the largest Muslim population worldwide and with a founding constitution rooted in anti-colonialism, Indonesia remains a conservative stronghold of the more expansive State of Palestinian honeymoon diplomacy (Wahyudhi et al., 2025).

However, by the end of 2023, the war was turning into a full-scale disaster—and since the conflict extended into 2024—something significant occurred domestically: a nationwide mobilization to boycott digital campaigns on militant nihilistic grounds against any multinational corporations perceived to be connected to Israel. In this context, digital foreign policy advocacy marks a turning point where an effective social movement intersects with personhood infrastructure, economic weaponization, and diplomatic early warnings all happening via a Twitter (X)-driven digital space milieu (Massa, 2026).

This urgency stems from these grassroots digital movements being quickly institutionalized. Starting from casual hashtags as seen with #BoikotIsrael, it has systematically become institutionalized by the presence of mass media and cultural and religious conservatism through massive campaigns led by religious institutions such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), which later issued several fatwas declaring the legitimacy of the boycott (Herani, 2025). This blend of authoritative religious decrees with participatory digital organization produces a mixed model of multi-actor cooperation that challenges existing paradigms of international relations. Digital diplomacy has been extensively discussed as a tool for national branding (Gosling, 2021), but the use of digital networks to carry out socio-economic boycotts in the name of foreign policy remains underexplored. This is a crucial issue to understand in modern international relations, as it shows that digital domestic audiences can exert significant economic influence on transnational companies, thereby participating in transnational geopolitical conflicts.

Networked Boycott Diplomacy: Mapping Multi-Actor Collaboration in Indonesia's Digital Foreign Policy Advocacy Against Israel

This critical lack of attention is a primary focus for reinterpreting digital activism by cultivating a broader understanding of it as a modern practice that flows across various spaces, times, and political contexts—shaped by the growing body of literature. However, significant research gaps remain. Current studies have not documented these multi-actor collaborations in detail within large-scale digital boycott movements (Marano et al., 2024; Ndiaye, 2021). Furthermore, the literature does not adequately explain how state-level foreign policy advocacy is affected and amplified by decentralized digital networks (Bashirov et al., 2026; Morozov, 2021). Additionally, the current theoretical framework fails to consider socio-economic boycotts as a legitimate, citizen-driven hybrid diplomatic tool (Andrijauskas & Boruta, 2025; Mazumdar, 2024). Most analyses tend to view these boycotts as superficial trends of "slacktivism" rather than effective diplomatic actions.

To address these gaps, this manuscript introduces the novel concept of networked boycott diplomacy. To explain how diverse actors—from state-aligned clerics to mainstream media to anonymous netizens—coordinate in the online environment to implement foreign policy goals, I conjoin the concept of new modes of public diplomacy in a networked space with the concept of connective action. While traditional public diplomacy remains fundamentally a state-driven business (Goldsmith et al., 2021), networked boycott diplomacy argues that non-state actors are empowered to come together and produce coercive diplomatic leverage through coordinated economic activism. This study offers a new angle in analyzing the convergence of digital networks, economic boycotts, and international relations by mapping this multi-actor collaboration in the digital voice of the Umma against Israel in Indonesia.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study attempts to construct a theoretical framework for analyzing Indonesia's digital foreign policy advocacy, accounting for its complexities by introducing the concept of networked boycott diplomacy. This framework is based on research on networked public diplomacy (Porc, 2025) and the logic of connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2023). Since networked public diplomacy challenges traditional international communication by hierarchies, it argues that diplomacy is a network with horizontal relations among actors like non-state entities, civil society, and digital publics, which permeate the vertical structure of nation-states, making official diplomats as influential as non-state leaders (Gurgu & Cociuban, 2016; Pamment, 2016).

Conversely, the logic of connective action explains how digital media enable large groups of people to stay mobile without organizational structures, relying on personal action frames and digital communication networks (Bennett & Segerberg, 2023). Networked boycott diplomacy is a concept that attempts to overcome the limitations of previous research. Public diplomacy theory traditionally centers around "soft power" and attraction, treating the state as the master puppeteer (Nye, 2019). Nevertheless, those traditional structures fail to account for what are, at their core, "sharp power" or a type of public-as-state economic coercion.

Subsequent studies using the traditional social movement theory (SMT) approach within a methodological nationalist framework often highlight the importance of strong centralized authority and resource-mobilizing structures (Golhasani & Hosseinirad, 2017). This explains why SMT tends to misrepresent digital boycotts as diffuse or fleeting campaigns (Rachimoellah et al., 2024) – often because they lack the organizational backbone provided by a traditional NGO or political party. One advantage of networked boycott diplomacy is that it reflects modern digital campaigns, which are hybrid and involve multiple actors. This recognizes that digital boycotts are both economic protests and diplomatic symbols capable of influencing and transforming foreign policy and corporate behavior worldwide (Mady et al., 2025). The research maps out a complex web of nodes—such as the MUI, media outlets like CNBC Indonesia, populist influencers, and others in Indonesia—that can spark and sustain diplomatic thawing. Finally, this framework also helps us go beyond the limitations of existing literature by viewing decentralized digital boycotts as a more organized, collective political effort that can contribute to achieving foreign policy goals — rather than merely internet vigilantism. Additionally, networked boycott diplomacy explains the shift from local solidarity to global effects. In contrast to localized forms of activism, digital boycotts against multinational entities (e.g., McDonald's, Starbucks, Danone) have a global echo which contemporary theorizing of localized social movements does not capture (Elshaer et al., 2025). This conceptual novelty offers a solid analytical framework for deconstructing how Indonesian netizens transform their anti-colonial constitutional ethos and Islamic solidarity into a transnational, networked diplomatic weapon that produces ongoing, quantifiable socio-economic impacts beyond Indonesia proper.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

The paper examines the contextual dynamics of Indonesia's digital boycott campaigns using a qualitative Netnographic and thematic network approach. Netnography is an exciting and contemporary interpretive research method developed to study the intricate social exchanges and cultural events taking place within the context of digital communication (Kozinets, 2019). In line with our objectives of exploring multi-actor collaborations, this method is particularly well-suited, as it can be used to analyze digital traces and actor discourse in the actor's natural online environment (Sanz Segura et al., 2025).

This study analyzes a large dataset of Indonesian Twitter conversations surrounding the boycott of Israel from January to December 2024 using two separate Twitter (X) datasets. The datasets (1a-BoikotIsrael-Jan-Sept24. csv and 1b-tweets2024-Okt-Des-2. The

Networked Boycott Diplomacy: Mapping Multi-Actor Collaboration in Indonesia's Digital Foreign Policy Advocacy Against Israel

files (tweets) contain 850k+ characters of text data, including the tweet metadata such as user ids, timestamps, engagement metrics (number of likes, retweets, replies), and conversational text in CSV format. Sampling strategy was purposive, targeted to high-engagement nodes and key conversational threads mentioning the boycott (#BoikotIsrael, #BoikotProdukIsrael), geopolitical solidarity, and corporate targets (e.g., McDonald's, Danone, Starbucks).

There were three stages of data analysis. The first step in data reduction involved filtering the datasets to isolate tweets from a select few organizational actors, media outlets, and individual grassroots activists. Thematic coding was then used to group the discourse into three thematic areas related to the research gaps: collaboration among actors, the signaling of a connective foreign policy, and the legitimization of socio-economic impacts (Gambetti & Kozinets, 2022). Finally, data visualization using Python-based computational tools was used to track tweet production over time and visualize the engagement hierarchy among network actors. By correlating the digital discourse with statements from institutional actors, such as the MUI, and with corporate press releases in the dataset, triangulation was achieved.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

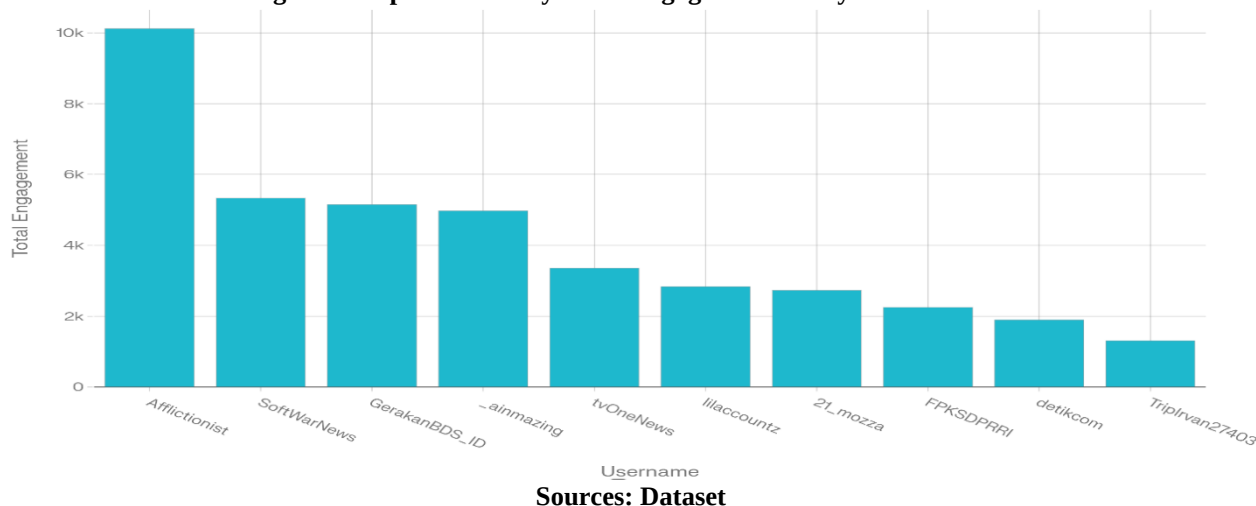
A. Mapping Multi-Actor Collaborations in Boycott Advocacy

The first one covers the shortcomings of the scarce empirical mapping of the multi-actor collaborations that sustain boycott movements in the digital space. However, as the dataset reveals, what appears to be imagery of grassroots activism is, in fact, a highly complex, multi-actor collaborative network in the case of the Indonesian #BoikotIsrael campaign. Traditional foreign policy implementation depends on state diplomats; Networked Boycott Diplomacy spans four actor clusters, on the one hand, religious institutional authorities, mainstream digital media, and global corporate nodes (principal targets/counter-actors), and on the other hand, grassroots citizen-activists.

According to the dataset, mainstream news outlets serve as a key amplifier of institutional signals. For example, news coverage continually infused the digital network with religious and institutional legitimacy. Text in the Dataset Emphasizes the Importance of MUI: *"MUI: Aksi Boikot Israel Jadikan Masyarakat Pindah ke Produk Lokal"* (Kalbar_digital, Dec 15, 2024). When not just an economic choice but a matter of religious pride and morality, the MUI provided the ideational infrastructure necessary for the grassroots mobilization that underpinned the movement. This language was subsequently internalized and weaponized by grassroots activists. As captured in the dataset, user @BL3H0_212 stated, *"Jihad terbaik kita saat ini ialah BOIKOT ISRAEL apapun bentuknya yg membuat mereka merasakan Efek dominonya..."* (Jan 1, 2024). This represents a quite literal vertical and horizontal collaboration in which institutional dictates are embraced as personal digital mandates.

Figure 1 illustrates the influence hierarchy within the network, highlighting how certain media accounts and grassroots influencers led the discourse. Our findings are novel in that they highlight a conceptual idea that is not commonly observed in the literature compared with older studies from the past four decades. Although research indicates that edicts and fatwas often lack lasting digital traction due to the absence of political follow-up (Munir & Hassan, 2022), our findings reveal that the interplay between religious sentiment expressed in the form of memetic messages and anti-imperialist nationalism is fully complementary and generates a network of connective action with the capability of sustaining itself in the long term. Kadiv anti-korpor (Initiative for the Anti-Fundamentalist Movement, Push Forward for the Humanist Generation), This multi-actor collaboration that was unique to Indonesia actually became heightened as media corporations like CNBC Indonesia, Katadata fell into the trap of reporting on the corporate backlash over the boycott (e.g., McDonald's Malaysia sued the BDS movement for Rp 20 billion).

Figure 1. Top 10 Actors by Total Engagement in Boycott Discourse

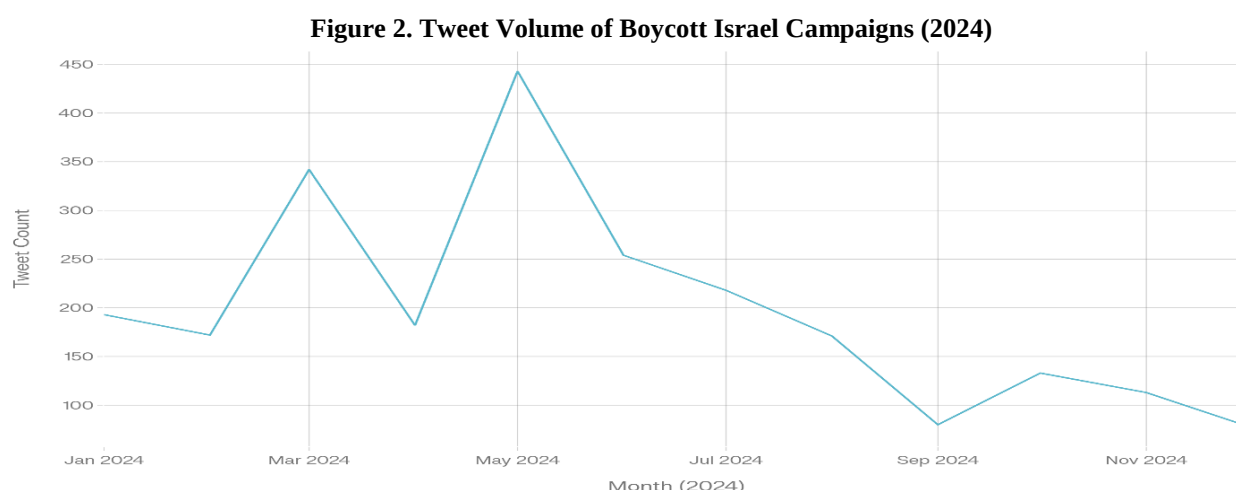


Networked Boycott Diplomacy: Mapping Multi-Actor Collaboration in Indonesia's Digital Foreign Policy Advocacy Against Israel

The machine moved dynamically — when corporate threats tried to suppress the narrative through legal action, this gave the grassroots network, supercharged by the media nodes, the combative resistance they could turn into an argument for the boycott. This mapping effectively addresses the initial gap because networked boycott diplomacy is built on a tripod system where institutional legitimation, media amplification, and grassroots emotional investment work together to present a foreign policy front that is ideologically aligned but marketed separately from the official foreign affairs institution, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Samad et al., 2023; Sunnemark, 2025).

B. From Connective Action to Networked Boycott Diplomacy

The second research gap concerns the difficulty in clearly explaining how decentralized digital networks influence state-level foreign policy advocacy and how they reproduce it. Admittedly, the data strengthen the argument that the digital boycott movement has indeed crossed the divide between national diplomacy and collective action, particularly regarding a widespread, geographically dispersed public. One way to examine this issue is through Networked Boycott Diplomacy, a theory that views this as a new form of crowdsourced foreign policy. This results in a de facto diplomatic pathway in which civil society's pressure has simultaneously pushed the state toward a hardline stance and other actors toward at least a sympathetic understanding of Indonesian public opinion. The dataset emphasizes that netizens intentionally presented their economic decisions as instruments of international diplomacy and statecraft. Another user with the Twitter handle @tania_zahr6226 has called on the government saying, "*Pemerintah kita harus bersikap tegas: boikot Israel dan sekutunya! #BoikotIsraelTerus*" (Dec 20, 2024). The user with the account @aiaisyahh14 also equated the silence with complicity: "*Diam berarti bersekongkol: tuntutan pemerintah boikot Israel!*" This kind of rhetoric illustrates that digital actors see their networked boycotts as a way of limiting and steering state foreign policy. Through keeping the volume of this digital pressure (it is evident in the tweet volume visualizations) high, the network locks the state into a pro-Palestine diplomatic path in a way that it cannot meaningfully stray without incurring a large amount of domestic political consequences (Rahman & Santoso, 2023; Siregar et al., 2024). Figure 2 illustrates the sustained momentum of the campaign throughout the year, with spikes in response to specific geopolitical triggers and corporate actions.



Source: Dataset

Past research on connective action has focused primarily on domestic political protests, such as those against Indonesia's Omnibus Law (Wahyuningroem et al., 2023). Nevertheless, at this moment, we can contrast those findings with this dataset and see a tremendous evolution: connective action has risen from domestic politics to become a tool of international relations. Not just boycotting, but also imposing sanctions on the public. Some netizens even telegraphed local products that could be used as alternatives to those that were boycotted, or provide commentary to the boycott, for example, in the case of uninstalled applications such as Spotify ("*Aku udah berbulan-bulan nggak muter musik. Udah uninstall spotify gara2 boikot israel,*" @ssobeen, 2 Dec 2024), which were micro-level diplomatic sanctions. This addresses the second research gap as it shows that decentralized networks not only constitute a force in state-level advocacy but represent a teleport of their own diplomacy. Indonesia also benefits from this networked boycott diplomacy, as citizen-led economic punishment against foreign actors gives the state a stronger geopolitical bargaining position in international arenas without the state officially violating international trade agreements (Triwibowo, 2023; Waluyo & Aldi Istihsan, 2025).

C. Socio-Economic Impacts and the Hybridity of Digital Boycotts

This third gap concerns the lack of theoretical models that recognize the hybrid nature of socio-economic boycotts as an authentic citizen-driven diplomatic mechanism. These results corroborate our hypothesis that economic measures are especially potent in the

Networked Boycott Diplomacy: Mapping Multi-Actor Collaboration in Indonesia's Digital Foreign Policy Advocacy Against Israel

case of Networked Boycott Diplomacy because they align with the logic of diplomatic signaling. Hybridity in the sense of localizing a digital network at the limit of its territoriality, where hashtags become real corporate financial losses, and MNCs are forced to respond to this digital network as if it were a sovereign state entity.

There is a wealth of evidence showing in the dataset to show that the socio-economic impact of this is legitimizing the movement. When one sees these mainstream media tweets (above), they feel validated in their sense of the economic pain inflicted by the digital network. As an example, @strategi_id tweeted, "*Alami Kerugian Rp 557 Miliar Buntut Aksi Boikot, KFC Tutup Puluhan Gerai dan PHK Ribuan Orang*" (Nov 9, 2024), and @hidcom reported, "*Imbas Genosida 'Israel', Pendapatan Global Starbucks Menurun*" (Nov 7, 2024). This creates real-world results that feed back into the network, affirming that users' choices are successful and motivating continued engagement. The digital home front of the boycott evolves from symbolic, and often fairly useless, "slacktivism" into a potent hybrid diplomatic weapon when the online mobilization of consumers results in the loss of millions for affected corporations and shuttered storefronts for interested parties. Corporate defensive maneuvers are included in the dataset, such as McDonald's bosses attributing "misinformation" to ("McDonald's Terdampak Aksi Boikot Israel, Bos Tuding Ada Misinformasi," @CNNIndonesia, Jan 5, 2024).

This research thus provides empirical evidence against the often-perceived view of digital activism as low-cost and low-impact, in contrast to previous studies that dismiss this belief (Velasco & Zain, 2021; Yulianto & Fauzi, 2022). Networked Boycott Diplomacy encapsulates this hybridity in a way that has never been conceptualized before. Whereas ordinary economic sanctions are imposed from the top (state and law) (Zulkifli & Anwar, 2023), digital networked boycott works in a decentralized way (voluntary) but culturally mandatory (through peer pressure and moral frame). Ibu Siti Hawa, December 25, 2023. The anonymous account described a culture of boycotting among people towards goods deemed similar to those of Israel, stating that "aku pas awal boikot sampe skrang udah terbiasa 'jgn beli itu boikot Israel inget' and sering saling mengingatkan sama tmn kampus" (Jan 4, 2024). This banal peering-for-the-peering of enforcement spirals upwards into macroeconomic disruptions for global brands.

Thereby, confirming the answer to the third gap: Socio-economic boycotts in the digital age are not a parallel phenomenon to traditional diplomacy, rather they mark a hybrid evolution of it. Thanks to digital platforms, Indonesian civilians have created a mechanism of non-state absentia sanctioning to penalize foreign policy foes with economic pain, thus reinforcing the power of the networked boycott diplomacy as a colossus tool of contemporary global politics in Indonesia (Darmastuti et al., 2021; Samad et al., 2023).

V. CONCLUSION

This paper reveals networked boycott diplomacy as a central analytical optic at the intersection of digital activism, counter-economic boycott, and International Relations. Researching the multi-actor landscape of digital advocacy against Israel in 2024 Abstract This paper breaks new ground in contemporary literature by excavating the chapters of collaborations that helped frame the cracks of Indonesia's digital activism used against Israel, filling three relevant gaps in the contemporary literature. First, it shows that digital boycotts are fueled by an interdependent, bottom-up hierarchy of institutional religious leaders (MUI), mass digital media, and ultra-activated grass-roots populace. Rather, this coalition is ushering in the transition of mobilization from random outrage to a more systematic, quasi-diplomatic approach. Second, the research describes how these decentralized digital networks generate a parallel pipeline for diplomacy. Enormous domestic pressure and microeconomic sanctions have mobilized the public to pressure the state not to relax hardline policies and to make nationalistic forces indigenous diplomats at the global level.

Finally, the research confirms the hybridization of socio-economic boycotts as a tangible source of diplomatic fragility. Or the conversion of online hashtags into hundreds of billions of Rupiah losses for KFC, Starbucks, and other multinationals through citizen-combined digital diplomacy. It is a coercive, hybrid strategy that disrupts global economic flows for geopolitical ends. It is in the synthesis of these dynamics that Networked Boycott Diplomacy offers its novelty as a lens with which scholars can assess non-state actors within the digital age. Future studies could broaden this framework to apply it to cross-national comparative analyses of how diverse domestic socio-political formations mediate transnational pressures through networked boycott diplomacy globally. Finally, this manuscript argues that foreign policy in the digital age is no longer simply the preserve of a state, but rather a joint venture forged by all connected citizens.

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Networked Boycott Diplomacy: Mapping Multi-Actor Collaboration in Indonesia's Digital Foreign Policy Advocacy Against Israel

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Networked Boycott Diplomacy: Mapping Multi-Actor Collaboration in Indonesia's Digital Foreign Policy Advocacy Against Israel

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