

Anger at Parliament Resulted in Mass Demonstrations and Riots

In August 2025, there was a large demonstration in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, demanding the dissolution of the Indonesian House of Representatives due to poor performance by its members. The demonstration invitation was carried out without organization, without command, broadcast through social media, inviting the public to take action together at the Indonesian House of Representatives to reject the fantastic allowances totaling more than one hundred million rupiah (around KRW 8,620,689; KRW 1 = IDR 11.60) per month, especially the housing allowance of IDR. 50,000,000 (KRW 4,310,345) per month on the grounds that the House of Representatives members no longer receive official housing, which was considered to hurt the people, because it was in stark contrast to the wages received by the people, and considering that the people were getting poorer every day. Many people were laid off, unemployed, and living in poverty, but the people's representatives actually received very large allowances.

The demonstrations were also held because many people were disappointed with the arrogant attitudes of members of the House of Representatives who appeared to belittle their constituents. These included Ahmad Sahroni from the National Democratic Party (Nasdem), who said, "People who want to dissolve the House of Representatives are the world's idiots!"; Eko Patrio and Uya Kuya from the National Mandate Party (PAN), who were caught on camera dancing after a House meeting with the President and labelled as dancing because of an increase in House allowances; and Nafa Urbach from Nasdem, who was accused of defending the provision of housing allowances because they had to pay expensive rent near the DPR complex. Because the call for demonstrations was considered appropriate to the current situation, many people were attracted to join the demonstrations, including university students, high school students, online motorcycle taxi drivers, and workers.

Public anger then spilled over into mass demonstrations across Indonesia, attended by a majority of the younger generation (Gen Z and Millennials). Calls for demonstrations were made through social media. Without any leadership, everyone moved towards the DPR RI and House Buildings in

each Province/Regency/City.

Instead of being met by their representatives, the demonstrators were very disappointed when none of them met them. Even all members of the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI) and their staff were working from home to avoid the protesters. What made the demonstrators even angrier was the news that some of the representatives were going on working visits abroad with more vacations using the state budget, which is, in fact, public money, rather than carrying out serious working visits for the benefit of the people. As a result, the demonstrators began to use violence by throwing stones, mineral water bottles, wood, and other objects, as well as destroying the fence of the House complex, writing graffiti, and attacking police officers guarding the House complex, so that the police then took firm action by breaking up the demonstration, which turned into anarchy.

Following the failure of Monday's demonstration, the demonstrations resumed on Thursday, August 28, 2025, divided into two actions: the first, a labor demonstration led by Said Iqbal, demanding, among other things, the abolition of outsourcing and the rejection of low wages, held peacefully in the morning. The second, a demonstration by students, high school students, and online motorcycle taxi drivers, was held in the afternoon. Initially peaceful, however, because no leaders or members of the House of Representatives met with the demonstrators, the demonstration turned violent. Water cannons and tear gas were used to disperse the anarchist demonstrators from noon until nightfall.

Excessive Violence in Breaking Up Demonstrations Has Resulted in demands for Police Reform

During the dispersal of the demonstration, public anger was triggered against the police, when a Police Mobile Brigade Corps tactical vehicle ran over online motorcycle taxi driver Affan Kurniawan, resulting in his death. In an instant, the House of Representatives, previously the people's primary enemy, transformed into the police as the target of public criticism.

Anarchic actions occurred everywhere, demanding accountability from the Indonesian National Police. Protesters used various violent methods, including attacking police stations and burning public facilities. In Jakarta, various public facilities were burned by anarchist mobs, including seven toll gates, seven bus stops, four police posts, one police district office, and five police precinct offices in East Jakarta. In Makassar, the Makassar Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) building was set on fire, killing three DPRD staff and one online motorcycle taxi driver, who was beaten by a mob on suspicion of being an intelligence agent. In Surabaya, the east side of the historic East Java Governor's Building was set on fire by a mob, along with several police precinct offices and police posts. In Yogyakarta, the driving license renewal service building and the complaint area of the Yogyakarta Regional Police Headquarters were set on fire by a mob. In Bandung, the People's Consultative Assembly building, located across from the West Java DPRD building, was set on fire by a mob.

Police officers across Indonesia subsequently arrested 6,719 people. Of this number, 959 people were identified as suspects, consisting of 664 adult suspects and 295 juvenile suspects.

Even though systematic and massive acts of anarchy have occurred and at least 10 people have died, the Indonesian President has refused public demand to form an independent fact-finding team. The President has allowed the National Commission on Human Rights and other State Commissions to conduct an independent investigation. This has disappointed the people because they consider the President to have no sense of empathy, and suspect that the President already knows who is behind it. The suspicion was that behind these acts of anarchy and destruction of public facilities, occurring systematically in almost all major cities in Indonesia, the military was exploiting uncontrollable public anger to induce the president to declare Martial Law, thereby take over security from the hands of the Police.

Public attention has returned to the dispersal of the demonstrations by the Indonesian National Police, who were widely accused of using excessive force, including beating and kicking demonstrators and firing tear gas, including the use of expired tear gas canisters, which were considered excessive, caused panic among demonstrators and bystanders who were not participating in the demonstration, who also inhaled the tear gas, causing shortness of breath and watery eyes.

The August demonstrations also caused concern among community groups, including celebrities and netizens. They called for the people's demands, known as '17 + 8', which consisted of 17 short-term demands and 8 long-term demands. These demands were directed at the President, the House of Representatives (DPR), the Chairpersons of Political Parties, the Indonesian National Police (POLRI), the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), and the Ministers of Economic Affairs. These demands were described as a summary of various public demands. The short-term demands have a deadline of September 5, 2025, and the long-term demands have a deadline of August 31, 2026. Celebrities, netizens, and students will periodically hold demonstrations to demand that all their demands be met.

Public calls for the National Police to immediately implement reforms were heard again after the death of Affan Kurniawan. The President even promised to immediately form a National Police Reform Committee to improve the police force after meeting with the National Conscience Movement (Gerakan Nurani Bangsa) – a group that was established by National Figures, such as Former First Lady Shinta Nuriyah Wahid and Religious Leaders, at the State Palace on September 11, 2025.

It turns out that the Indonesian National Police were already ready to respond to public demands. On September 17, 2025, the National Police Chief issued a decree establishing a National Police Transformation Acceleration Team, consisting of 52 police officers, to evaluate the implementation of the National Police Reforms that have been underway since 1999.

Although the President's promise to form a National Police Reform Committee has yet to be fulfilled, the current unfinished Cultural Reform of the POLRI is a momentum for the Indonesian National Police to complete its homework seriously.

The importance of re-implementing the National Police Cultural Reform to truly transform the National Police into a professional and humane civilian institution

National Police Reform has entered its 26th year in 2025, marked by the issuance of Presidential Instruction No. 2 of 1999 by President B. J. Habibie concerning the Separation of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) and the POLRI.

National Police Reform is divided into three aspects: first, the structural aspect, encompassing changes to the police's position within the state system, organizational form, structure, and status. Second, the instrumental aspect encompasses changes in philosophy, doctrine, functions, authority, and competencies. Third, the cultural aspect, namely changes in the mindset and behavior (culture-set), is believed to be correct by the leadership and members of the POLRI. This includes changing the mindset and behavior of the leadership and members of the Indonesian National Police to become professional civilian police officers, mastering their duties to serve, protect, and serve the community, and enforce the law to maintain public security and order. no longer using excessive violence or militaristic actions; respecting human rights; not having a luxurious lifestyle; not being arrogant, where these changes must be reflected in the recruitment system, education, budget, personnel, management, and police operations.

The public can see that Structural Reform has been implemented, including the change in the structure of the POLRI to be directly under the President, after previously being integrated into the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI) for 38 years and, together with the TNI, under the Minister of Defense/the Chief of Armed Forces.

Furthermore, Instrumental Reform of the Indonesian National Police has also been implemented, including the ratification of Law Number 2 of 2002 concerning the POLRI and other regulations that affirm that the POLRI is a civil institution that is humanistic and respects human rights.

Cultural Reform, however, has indeed been implemented, but its transformation will take more

time, as cultural reform requires a change in perspective, way of thinking, and behavior that cannot be implemented quickly.

Although the POLRI has demonstrated improved performance during the Reform period and garnered public praise, in practice, cases of excessive use of force still draw public attention. Furthermore, the public also observes that some police officers still live lavish lifestyles, behave arrogantly, and even extortion, which is inconsistent with public expectations for a more service-oriented, nurturing, and protective police force, is still needed. This implies that the National Police Cultural Reform must be actively implemented by all leaders and members of the POLRI.

The Indonesian National Police Cultural Reform has been a focus of the POLRI Chiefs during the Reformation era. Various efforts have been made by past Chiefs of POLRI, including the development of the 2005-2025 National Police Grand Strategy under the leadership of Chief General Dai Bachtiar (2001–2005), through Decree of the Chief of the National Police of the Republic of Indonesia No. Pol: Skep/360/IV/2005 dated June 10, 2005. The Grand Strategy of the Indonesian National Police is divided into three stages, namely Stage I: Trust Building in 2005-2010, Stage II: Partnership in 2011-2015, and Stage III: Strive for Excellence in 2016-2025. With the Grand Strategy of the Indonesian National Police, the leadership and all members of the Indonesian National Police are expected to be able to carry out their duties professionally and independently.

During the leadership of the Chief of Police General Bambang Hendarso Danuri (2008–2010), the Cultural Reform of the Indonesian National Police was realized by issuing two Chief of Police Regulations, namely first, Chief of Police Regulation Number 1 of 2009 concerning the Use of Force and second, Chief of Police Regulation Number 8 of 2009 concerning the Implementation of Human Rights Principles and Standards in the Implementation of Duties of the Republic of Indonesia National Police. With the existence of Chief of Police Regulation Number 1 of 2009 and Chief of Police Regulation Number 8 of 2009, it was hoped that it would significantly change the behavior of all members of the Indonesian National Police to be more humane and respect human rights. However, in the journey, it turned out that this hope had not yet been realized properly.

During the leadership of National Police Chief General Tito Karnavian (2016–2019), Cultural

Reform of the National Police has again become a focus, due to the persistence of corrupt, hedonistic, and excessively violent behavior among police officers when dealing with the public. With the PROMOTER (professional, modern, and trustworthy) work program, the National Police Chief strives to improve the professionalism and modernity of police services to the public to gain public trust. The Promoter (Professional, Modern, and Trustworthy) program launched by National Police Chief General Tito Karnavian has shown positive results. Public trust in the National Police institution continues to increase. The POLRI, which in 2016 was among the three least trusted institutions by the public, is now based on the results of surveys conducted by various institutions, in the top three positions of institutions with the best public trust, including based on a survey conducted by Kompas Research and Development in 2014 to 2018 showing that the level of public satisfaction with the Indonesian National Police continues to increase as follows: 46.7% (2014), 51.2% (2015), 63.2% (2016), 70.2% (2017), 82.9% (2018). To further strengthen the spirit of the Indonesian National Police Cultural Reform, the Chief of Police, General Tito Karnavian, ratified the Regulation of the Chief of Police Number 8 of 2017 concerning State Officials' Wealth Reports (LHKPN), the Regulation of the Chief of Police Number 9 of 2017 concerning Business for Police Members, and the Regulation of the Chief of Police No. 10 of 2017 concerning Luxury Goods.

During the leadership of National Police Chief General Idham Azis (2019–2021), the PROMOTER program was resumed. With Telegram Letter No. ST/30/XI/Hum. 3.4/2019/DivPropam, the National Police Chief prohibited all police officers from flaunting luxurious lifestyles.

Under the leadership of National Police Chief General Listyo Sigit Prabowo (2021–to date), public support for the POLRI increased, particularly due to the significant role they played in assisting the government in combating the spread of Covid-19 and increasing community resilience, including strengthening the community's economic capabilities. However, it was unfortunate that when the Sambo case (a two-star police general who killed his staff), Kanjuruhan tragedy (135 football supporters died in a panic as they rushed out of the Kanjuruhan Stadium in Malang after inhaling tear gas fired by the police), and Teddy Minahasa case (a two-star police general who sells drugs) emerged in 2022, public trust in the POLRI dropped to an all-time low of 48.5%. To improve public trust, the POLRI Chief initiated “the Friday's Approaching People” program, intended to

encourage all police officers to be more responsive to the public's voices and implement their expectations. Various efforts to support the government programs in maintaining food security include establishing kitchens that provide free nutritious meals for students, planting corn, and providing affordable food aid. These efforts were welcomed by the public and quickly restored public trust in the POLRI until the death of Affan Kurniawan in the August demonstration messed up everything.

| The Cultural Reform of the Indonesian National Police that the Public Has Been Hoping for Since the 1998 Reform Era

The public's primary complaint is that the Cultural Reform of the POLRI has not yet been properly implemented. The mindset and culture of the POLRI members have not improved since the New Order era. Consequently, the public still sees many the POLRI members engaging in acts of corruption, excessive violence, arrogance, lavish lifestyles, unprofessional behavior, and even involvement in practical politics.

The public is increasingly angry because the POLRI budget is very large, reaching IDR 138.5 trillion (KRW 11,939,655,172,414) in 2025 and IDR 145.7 trillion (KRW 12,560,344,827,586) in 2026, but is not matched by high-quality work.

The Indonesian National Police's human resources are the first to be reformed, starting with a clean recruitment process based on a merit system, ensuring that the selected police personnel are qualified individuals. In fact, the POLRI isn't the only one facing clean recruitment issues. Nearly all government recruitment processes are plagued by issues of collusion, corruption, and nepotism, a legacy of the New Order that remains unaddressed to this day. This is why it's so difficult to improve the Indonesian National Police, as the system remains permissive of corruption.

In the police force, the public often finds the recruitment process to be less than clean. The term "bribery" is often heard, involving the payment of a sum of money to pass the selection process. The amounts are very big. To pass Police School, people are not reluctant to pay hundreds of millions of

rupiah (around KRW 8 million). Meanwhile, to pass the Police Academy, the figure reaches billions of rupiah (around KRW 86 million). Although the National Police always denies it and claims that the police recruitment is clean based on the BETAH system (clean, transparent, accountable, and humanistic), the public still believes that becoming a police officer requires payment. Several cases of bribery have been discovered in the police selection process throughout Indonesia and are being prosecuted. Unfortunately, not all cases are prosecuted, only those that come to light and attract public attention. Although these bribery cases fall under the criminal realm, the process is usually carried out through a code of ethics process with light penalties, and rarely ends in criminal proceedings. On average, if a case occurs, the bribe money is simply returned, thus providing no deterrent effect for the perpetrators, and the incidents are repeated in subsequent years. Some field officers involved are subject to ethical code proceedings, but this process stops at the lower levels, not reaching comprehensively to the higher levels. So, it's not surprising that every year the public continues to hear about bribery cases in police recruitment. The dirty initial process naturally impacts subsequent processes, including the placement and assignment of police officers. Superiors who should be supervising are more preoccupied with finding sources of income for promotion, often even coercing officers to provide money.

The public complains that the police still display a militaristic attitude, particularly in handling demonstrations. Despite the National Police Chief's Regulation on the Implementation of Human Rights Principles and Standards in the Discharge of Police Duties, the material has not been properly absorbed during training at the Police School and the Police Academy. The lack of discussion and practice on human rights has led to the continued association of violence with the police.

Another complaint concerns the police's continued use of tear gas to disperse demonstrations, despite the public still being traumatized by the Kanjuruhan and Rempang tragedies. In the Kanjuruhan case, tear gas was blamed for triggering panic among Aremania football supporters, resulting in 135 people dying, and in the Rempang case, police fired excessive tear gas to disperse a demonstration by Rempang residents opposing the relocation of industrial estates, resulting in 11 elementary and middle school students fainting.

Torture during interrogation is also a public complaint. This includes demands for money in handling cases. During the New Order era, the term "KUHP" (the Indonesian Criminal Code) was

misused as “kasih uang habis perkara,” meaning that a case would be dropped if the accused agreed to pay the investigator. According to data from the National Police Commission (Kompolnas), public complaints about the performance of the Criminal Investigation Department account for 90% of the total annual public complaints, which average 4,000 complaints per year.

Although public complaints remain high, they are not commensurate with oversight and law enforcement. As a result, violations are repeated, leading to public criticism of “#percumalaporpolisi” (it is useless [for the people] to make a report to the police) and widespread virality of police abuse cases.

This contrasts with the situation during the 1998 Reformation, when the public strongly defended the POLRI, believing its integration into the ABRI would weaken it and render it unprofessional. The current situation is extremely dangerous, as few still believe the POLRI deserves to be defended and maintained as an institution responsible for maintaining security. Instead, the public praises the Fire Department and compares the police to Bank Central Asia’s security guards!

Many argue that the National Police should be repositioned under a ministry, rather than remaining under the President as it is currently, and becoming a political tool of the President and political elites. This argument seeks to equalize the TNI, which is under the Minister of Defense, although even being under a minister does not guarantee the TNI’s freedom from political interference.

Conclusion

The National Police Reform has been implemented since 1999, in the form of the National Police Structural Reform which places the National Police under the President, the National Police Instrumental Reform which changes the law and various regulations of the POLRI to become a professional, humanistic, and human rights-respecting civil institution, as well as the National Police Cultural Reform which requires a change in the mindset and culture set of the POLRI to become a civil police, eliminating militaristic traits, corrupt culture, hedonistic lifestyle, and arrogance, and increasing professionalism.

The lack of success of the National Police Cultural Reform requires all leaders and members to collectively change their mindset and culture to meet public expectations. Changes must be made across all aspects, particularly with regard to clean recruitment, education, and assignments that prioritize professionalism, strict guidance and supervision, and firm rewards and punishments.

The public must oversee the National Police Cultural Reform until the desired changes are truly realized, particularly the establishment of a new police culture as a professional, clean, and human rights-respecting civilian police force in carrying out its duties to serve, protect, and uphold the law to maintain public order and security.



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