

Legal Reform Post-Demonstration: An Analysis of the Impact of Protests on Public Policy

Darmawan Sutawijaya

Faculty of Law Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia

Received: July 23, 2025

Revised: August 27, 2025

Accepted: September 01, 2025

Published: September 26, 2025

Corresponding Author:

Author Name*: Darmawan

Sutawijaya

Email*:

darmawansutawijaya@upnvj.ac.id

Abstract: Demonstrations represent a crucial democratic mechanism for expressing public aspirations regarding state policies. The August 25, 2025 protests in Indonesia illustrate how socio-political pressure can drive legal reform and influence public policy, particularly concerning the transparency and accountability of legislative institutions. This study aims to analyze the impact of public demonstrations on the dynamics of legal reform and their effects on public policy. Based on this background, the research questions are: first, how do demonstrations affect legal reform in Indonesia; and second, to what extent do protests influence public policy changes, especially in terms of legislative transparency and accountability. The research employs a normative-juridical approach complemented by a socio-legal perspective, with a descriptive-analytical design. Primary data consists of legislation and regulations, secondary data from literature and media reports, and tertiary data from legal dictionaries and supporting documents. Data were collected through library research, media documentation, and document analysis, and were analyzed qualitatively. The findings indicate that the August 25, 2025 protests acted as a catalyst for legal reform and prompted shifts in public policy towards good governance principles, enhancing transparency, accountability, and public participation in the legislative process.

Keywords: Good Governance, Legal Reform, Legislative Transparency, Public Policy

INTRODUCTION

Law is fundamentally an instrument for establishing order, justice, and the protection of citizens' rights. However, in practice, the law is often dynamic and subject to change in response to social or political pressures. One factor that frequently acts as a catalyst for legal change is the emergence of protests or demonstrations. Demonstrations are not only regarded as a form of political expression by the public but also as a corrective mechanism against public policies perceived as unjust or deviating from the principles of social justice. In a democratic state, protests often serve as a channel of political communication between society and the government. Demands voiced through mass actions can influence legislative and executive decision-making. This phenomenon highlights the close relationship between social dynamics and legal reform. When public aspirations are not accommodated through formal channels, protests become a medium



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that pressures the government to evaluate or even amend policies.¹

A recent case illustrating this is the demonstration on August 25, 2025, across various regions of Indonesia. The protest was triggered by policies of the House of Representatives (DPR) considered insensitive to the economic conditions of the people, particularly regarding lavish allowances and facilities for DPR members. The demonstration escalated into widespread unrest, involving diverse social groups, including students, laborers, and online motorcycle taxi drivers. The impact was not only material losses and casualties but also strong demands for the government to undertake legal and public policy reforms, including reviewing parliamentary budgeting systems and addressing excessive use of force by law enforcement in controlling the crowd. This case underscores that demonstrations can serve as a catalyst for regulatory or policy changes. Ultimately, the government was compelled to take corrective measures to restore legal legitimacy and public trust.²

In Indonesia, demonstrations have historically played a crucial role in influencing legal and political trajectories. The fall of the New Order regime in 1998, the student-led protests against the revision of the Criminal Code (RUU KUHP) in 2019, and the large-scale mobilization against the Omnibus Law on Job Creation in 2020, all illustrate how social pressure has directly or indirectly compelled the government to reconsider or revise existing policies. These events highlight that public demonstrations not only signify dissatisfaction with state policies but also function as mechanisms of accountability that pressure legislative and executive bodies to act in accordance with democratic principles.³

A more recent case occurred on August 25, 2025, when protests erupted across various regions of Indonesia, triggered by the policies of the House of Representatives (DPR) deemed insensitive to the people's economic conditions, particularly the issue of lavish allowances and facilities for DPR members.⁴ The demonstration, involving diverse groups such as students, laborers, and online transportation drivers, escalated into widespread unrest that resulted in both material losses and casualties. Beyond the immediate impact, the protests generated strong demands for reforms, including a review of parliamentary budgeting systems and a call for greater accountability in the use of public funds. They also raised serious concerns about the excessive use of force by law enforcement, emphasizing the need for legal and institutional reforms in security governance⁵. This case underscores the significant role of demonstrations as catalysts for regulatory and policy changes, compelling the government to take corrective actions to restore legitimacy and public trust.

The phenomenon of demonstrations shaping legal reform is not unique to Indonesia. In many parts of the

¹ Firdaus, Muhamad Nurul dan Lusi Andriyani. "Politik Atas Identitas Agama Dan Etnis Di Indonesia". INDEPENDEN: Jurnal Politik Indonesia dan Global, Vol. 2 No. 2 (2021): 46-50

² Harsono, Harun. "Politik Identitas Dan Partisipasi Politik Di Media Sosial: Analisis Model Struktural Pada Generasi Z Di Kota Malang". Electoral Governance Jurnal Tata Kelola Pemilu Indonesia, Vol. 4 No. 2 (2023): 166-187

³ Lim, J. B. (2025). Digital media interventions in Southeast Asia. *Palgrave Macmillan*. DOI, 10, 978-3.

⁴ Baker, J. (2023). Reformasi reversal: structural drivers of democratic decline in Jokowi's middle-income Indonesia. *Bulletin of Indonesian economic studies*, 59(3), 341-364.

⁵ Saputra, M. R. (2025). Public Ethics and the Legitimacy of Indonesian Democracy: Protests over DPR Allowances, Elite Conflict, and Civil Response: Etika Publik dan Legitimasi Demokrasi Indonesia: Protes Tunjangan DPR, Konflik Elite, dan Respons Sipil. *Journal of State Democracy*, 1(1), 1-10.

world, mass mobilizations have historically acted as turning points for legal and institutional change⁶. For example, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States during the 1960s resulted in landmark legal reforms such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Similarly, the Arab Spring uprisings across North Africa and the Middle East led to constitutional reforms and legal restructuring, albeit with varying degrees of success and stability. These global experiences demonstrate that protests are not merely disruptive social actions, but rather expressions of collective political will that can initiate or accelerate legal reform⁷. Placing the Indonesian experience within this broader comparative framework emphasizes the universality of demonstrations as a driver of legal transformation in democratic and transitioning societies alike.

Despite the frequency and intensity of demonstrations in Indonesia, scholarly research has often concentrated on their political, sociological, or economic dimensions, while giving relatively limited attention to their direct implications for legal reform⁸. Studies tend to focus on the political behavior of demonstrators, the dynamics of social movements, or the strategies of state repression, but less frequently address the legal consequences that emerge as governments respond to protest demands⁹. This gap is particularly important to address because law and public policy should ideally evolve in response to legitimate public aspirations expressed through democratic mechanisms. By examining demonstrations not only as a form of political resistance but also as a legal catalyst, this research provides a nuanced perspective that bridges the domains of law, politics, and society.

Understanding how demonstrations shape the dynamics of legal reform and public policy is therefore critical for evaluating the responsiveness and accountability of democratic institutions in Indonesia. More importantly, it can contribute to broader debates on the role of civil society in shaping the rule of law, transparency, and justice in democratic governance. In this way, the study not only highlights the Indonesian experience but also contributes to comparative scholarship on the interrelationship between protest movements and legal change in contemporary democracies.¹⁰

Based on the above background, the research questions can be formulated as follows: First, how can demonstrations influence the dynamics of legal reform in Indonesia? Second, to what extent do such demonstrations impact public policy changes, particularly regarding the transparency and accountability of legislative institutions?

METHOD

⁶ Sastramidjaja, Y. (2019). INDONESIA'S DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION. *Activists in transition: Progressive politics in democratic Indonesia*.

⁷ Krastev, I. (2014). *Democracy disrupted: The politics of global protest*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

⁸ Rosser, A. (2013). *The politics of economic liberalization in Indonesia: State, market and power*. Routledge.

⁹ Earl, J., Maher, T. V., & Pan, J. (2022). The digital repression of social movements, protest, and activism: A synthetic review. *Science advances*, 8(10), eabl8198.

¹⁰ Iannone, A., Kinasih, S. E., & Wahyudi, I. (2023, December). Protests in Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines. In *Proceedings of the International Conference for Democracy and National Resilience (ICDNR 2023)* (Vol. 795, p. 128). Springer Nature.

The research method used in this study is a normative-juridical approach complemented by a socio-legal perspective, which involves analyzing relevant legislation while examining the socio- political context of the demonstrations and their impact on public policy. This study is descriptive- analytical in nature, with data sources consisting of primary legal materials (legislation related to the legislative system and budgetary policies), secondary legal materials (literature, previous research, scholarly articles, and media reports), and tertiary legal materials (legal dictionaries and encyclopedias). Data collection was conducted through library research, media documentation, and official document analysis, while data analysis employed a qualitative method involving data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing to explain the relationship between demonstrations and the emergence of legal reforms and changes in public policy.

DISCUSSION

Demonstrations can influence the dynamics of legal reform in Indonesia because, by nature, law is not static; it is dynamic and constantly interacts with social conditions. This aligns with the legal responsiveness theory (Nonet & Selznick, 1978), which posits that law changes when subjected to strong societal pressure. Demonstrations function as a mechanism of social control, reaffirming that law must reflect public justice values. In the context of the August 25, 2025 demonstrations, collective pressure from various societal groups compelled the government and the House of Representatives (DPR) to evaluate policies perceived as elitist. In other words, demonstrations act as a catalyst for legal reform, accelerating changes that were previously difficult to achieve through formal legislative procedures. Demonstrations have an impact on changes in public policy, particularly in terms of the transparency and accountability of legislative institutions. From the perspective of legitimacy theory (Suchman, 1995), a policy is only acceptable when it aligns with the values of the society it serves. When the House of Representatives (DPR) enacts policies that do not reflect social justice, its legitimacy weakens, prompting the public to express their rejection through demonstrations. Within the framework of good governance, especially the principles of transparency and accountability, protests function as a form of social correction that compels the state to provide public access to the budgeting process and ensures accountability in the use of public funds. Thus, demonstrations are not merely a means of expressing public aspirations but also an effective democratic instrument to promote public policies that are more responsive, just, and aligned with the needs of the wider community.

The Impact of the August 25, 2025 Demonstrations on the Dynamics of Legal Reform in Indonesia

The August 25, 2025 demonstrations represent a significant event in Indonesia's constitutional history, illustrating how social pressure can act as a powerful driver of legal reform. The protests were triggered by the policies of the House of Representatives (DPR) concerning the facilities and allowances of legislative members, which were considered excessive and misaligned with the socio-economic realities of the people. Initially sparked by the dissatisfaction of students and civil society groups, the protest quickly expanded to include laborers, online motorcycle taxi drivers, and other segments of civil society, creating strong collective momentum.¹¹ The broad participation across social strata revealed a profound crisis of moral legitimacy within the legislative institution, which, while constitutionally mandated to represent the people, was increasingly perceived as an embodiment of privilege and social injustice.

From a legal-theoretical perspective, this phenomenon can be analyzed through legal responsiveness theory, which posits that legal systems are not static but adaptive, often undergoing transformation in response to

¹¹ Ford, R. T. (2020). Protest Fatigue. *Nomos*, 62, 161-188.

societal demands and pressures.¹² Law, in this view, is not merely the product of state authority but the outcome of a continuous dialectic between formal legal norms and the lived realities of society. When public policies diverge sharply from the prevailing sense of justice, as was the case with the DPR allowances, legal legitimacy is undermined. The August 25 demonstrations exemplify this rupture, where public discontent escalated into collective action that generated systemic pressure for reform¹³. Demonstrations thus function as a corrective mechanism to unresponsive legal practices and serve as an informal yet effective form of constitutional dialogue between state and society.¹⁴

Empirically, the impact of the demonstrations can be observed in several key domains. First, the protests compelled policymakers to open discussions regarding the revision of regulations on allowances and facilities for legislative officials, signifying a corrective response to elitist policies that had long been shielded from scrutiny¹⁵. Second, the demonstrations catalyzed calls to strengthen transparency and accountability mechanisms in parliamentary budgeting, including demands for public access to budgetary data and enhanced oversight institutions¹⁶. Third, the violent dispersal of protests and the resulting casualties raised critical questions about the proportionality and legality of law enforcement practices¹⁷. This triggered broader debates on the need for reform in policing, crowd control, and the protection of human rights within Indonesia's democratic framework.

More broadly, this episode highlights the role of demonstrations as catalysts for legal change in contexts where formal legislative channels are obstructed by political resistance or elite interests. While parliamentary reforms may be stalled due to entrenched privilege, mass mobilization can exert extraordinary pressure that bypasses institutional inertia. In this sense, the August 25 protests can be seen as a continuation of Indonesia's historical tradition of protest-driven reform, echoing earlier episodes such as the 1998 Reformasi movement and the mobilizations against the Omnibus Law in 2020. Comparatively, this aligns with global patterns where mass protests have accelerated democratic and legal reforms, from the Civil Rights Movement in the United States to constitutional amendments emerging from people's uprisings in Latin America.

Thus, the August 25, 2025 protests should not be understood merely as spontaneous expressions of public dissatisfaction, but as a democratic instrument of social correction that reaffirms the foundational principle that law must reflect the aspirations and sense of justice of the people. They also serve as a reminder that democratic legitimacy does not solely rest upon electoral representation but is continuously negotiated

¹² Barrozo, P. (2020). Law in time: Legal theory and legal history. *Yale JL & Human.*, 31, 316.

¹³ Nicoli, F., & Dupont, C. (2021). Democratic legitimacy in times of European upheaval. In *The Future of Europe and the Future of the Planet: Collection of Papers on the Occasion of the Conference on the Future of Europe* (pp. 43-48). Spinelli Institute for Federalist Studies.

¹⁴ Landau, D. (2010). Political institutions and judicial role in comparative constitutional law. *Harv. Int'l LJ*, 51, 319.

¹⁵ Euchner, C. (2018). *Extraordinary politics: How protest and dissent are changing American democracy*. Routledge.

¹⁶ Molepo, M., & Jahed, M. (2023). Enhancing the Role of Parliament in the Budget-Making Processes. *African Journal of Governance and Development*, 12(2), 75-99.

¹⁷ Sentas, V., & Grewcock, M. (2018). Criminal law as police power: Serious crime, unsafe protest and risks to public safety. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, 7(3), 75-90.

through active civic participation and contestation. In this light, demonstrations become not only a socio-political phenomenon but also a constitutional force that reinforces the accountability of legal and political institutions in Indonesia's democratic trajectory.

The Impact of Demonstrations on Public Policy Changes, Particularly Regarding the Transparency and Accountability of Legislative Institutions

Demonstrations represent one of the most tangible democratic mechanisms for expressing public aspirations regarding state policies¹⁸. From a constitutional law perspective, demonstrations serve as the realization of citizens' constitutional rights, as stipulated in Article 28E paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia¹⁹, which guarantees freedom of association, assembly, and expression of opinion. When formal channels of political participation are perceived as inadequate in accommodating the interests of the people, protests become an effective corrective instrument for influencing public policy directions. The August 25, 2025 demonstrations exemplify this dynamic. DPR policies regarding the allowances and facilities for legislative members, perceived as excessive, triggered a widespread wave of protests. This mass action indicated a legitimacy crisis within the legislative institution, which, while expected to represent the people, was perceived as prioritizing elite interests. This aligns with legitimacy theory, which asserts that an organization's legitimacy can only be maintained if its actions and policies conform to dominant social norms and values. When legitimacy collapses, the public demands correction through demonstrations as a form of political pressure.²⁰

A primary impact of these demonstrations was the emergence of a more open evaluation of public policy, particularly in terms of transparency and accountability. Transparency requires openness of information, including public access to DPR budget data and details of benefits received by legislative members. Accountability demands mechanisms for political and legal responsibility regarding the policies enacted. Within the framework of good governance, these principles serve as a foundation to prevent discriminatory, elitist, and unresponsive policies that do not serve the broader public interest. Moreover, the demonstrations fostered stronger mechanisms for public participation in policy-making. Collective action by the people can be understood as a form of horizontal checks and balances, in which society exercises oversight over the government and DPR. This is consistent with deliberative democracy theory (Habermas, 1996), which emphasizes that policy legitimacy can only be achieved through active participation and open public dialogue. Through demonstrations, societal pressure shifted public policy from being closed and elitist to becoming more responsive, transparent, and accountable. Therefore, the impact of demonstrations on public policy extends beyond the mere repeal or revision of specific policies; it represents a transformation of the state's governance paradigm. Demonstrations function as a reminder that legislative power must not be exercised without public oversight, and that every public policy must reflect principles of social justice and

¹⁸ Della Porta, D. (2014). *Mobilizing for democracy: Comparing 1989 and 2011*. OUP Oxford.

¹⁹ Tutukansa, Aldho Faruqi. "Maraknya Pengaruh Kompleks Politik Identitas Di Indonesia". *Khazanah: Jurnal Mahasiswa*, Vol. 14 No. 1 (2022): 20-30

²⁰ Antari, Putu Eva Ditayani. "Implementasi Fungsi Pengawasan Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat dalam Upaya Memperkuat Sistem Presidensial di Indonesia". *Refleksi Hukum: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum*, Vol. 4 No. 2 (2020): 226

substantive democracy.²¹

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the discussion, it can be concluded that demonstrations have a significant impact on the dynamics of legal reform and changes in public policy in Indonesia. The August 25, 2025 protests demonstrated that mass action can serve as a catalyst for legal reform, accelerating regulatory changes when formal channels prove ineffective. Collective societal pressure successfully encouraged discourse on revising regulations concerning legislative allowances, strengthened demands for transparency in DPR budgeting, and emphasized the need to evaluate law enforcement practices by security apparatus. Moreover, the demonstrations directly influenced the direction of public policy, particularly in upholding the principles of transparency and accountability, which are fundamental pillars of good governance. This affirms that demonstrations are not merely political expressions but also a democratic instrument that ensures laws and public policies remain aligned with social justice values and public aspirations. In line with these conclusions, several recommendations can be made. The government and DPR should enhance public information openness, particularly in budget management, by implementing an independent and accessible audit system. Law enforcement agencies must prioritize proportionality and respect for human rights when handling demonstrations, ensuring that security personnel are perceived as protectors of citizens' constitutional rights rather than violators. Civil society is encouraged to sustain political participation through advocacy, public dialogue, and policy oversight, so that citizens' aspirations are conveyed systematically. Furthermore, academics and researchers should continue to examine the relationship between demonstrations, political legitimacy, and legal reform within Indonesia's democratic context, providing a scientific foundation for formulating more responsive and equitable policies.

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²¹ Wijayanti, Winda. "Eksistensi Undang-Undang Sebagai Produk Hukum dalam Pemenuhan Keadilan Bagi Rakyat (Analisis Putusan Mahkamah Konstitusi Nomor 50/PUU-X/2012)", *Jurnal Konstitusi*, Vol. 10 No. 1 (2016): 179

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