



Indonesia's Anarchic Protest Wave: Security & Strategic Analysis, Triggers, Actors, and Policy Fallout

Description

Introduction

In the past two weeks of August 2025, Indonesia was rocked by nationwide demonstrations that escalated into the worst civil unrest in decades. At least five to six people were killed, hundreds were injured, and nearly a thousand were arrested amid clashes between crowds and security forces. Protests that began peacefully—triggered by a plan for a housing allowance of around Rp50 million per month (approximately USD 3,000) for Members of Parliament (DPR RI)—morphed into riots across multiple regions. The tragedy of a 21-year-old motorcycle taxi (ojol) rider, Affan Kurniawan, run over by a Brimob armored vehicle during a demonstration, further inflamed public anger after the video went viral.

The demonstrations extended beyond Jakarta, reaching dozens of cities throughout the nation. Mobs reportedly torched DPRD (regional parliament) buildings, police posts, city buses, and public facilities in multiple provinces. More than three dozen local parliament buildings were damaged or burned in the unrest. The peak occurred on 28–30 August 2025, becoming the most severe security test for the administration of President Prabowo Subianto less than a year into office.

This report details the drivers and triggers of the protests, the key actors behind both mass mobilization and rioting, the responses of security agencies and government, the geographic spread and impacts, and the role of social media in disseminating narratives and shaping public opinion. The concluding section highlights significant findings for security and strategic, outlining broader implications for Indonesia's stability.

Background: Parliamentary Controversies and Public Resentment

The August 2025 protest wave did not erupt out of nowhere; it was fueled by a series of elite political controversies—particularly within the DPR RI—that intensified public resentment. Here is a brief timeline:

- **15 August 2025 – “DPR Dancing” Video Goes Viral:** After the 15 August Annual Session of the MPR, footage circulated showing legislators dancing in the chamber. Many citizens condemned it as tone-deaf and insensitive—especially as the housing allowance controversy brewed. The clip sparked broad irritation online.
- **20 August 2025 – Rp50 Million Housing Allowance Surfaces:** DPR Deputy Speaker Adies Kadir announced that, for the 2024–2029 term, members would no longer receive official residences but would instead be granted a housing allowance of approximately Rp50 million per month. He argued that this was not a “pay raise” but compensation, because state housing had been withdrawn. The justification backfired, as ordinary people viewed the amount as excessive given the high living costs they faced. The move cemented perceptions that legislators prioritized privilege over empathy.
- **22 August 2025 – Controversial Remarks from Nafa Urbach & Ahmad Sahroni:** Two DPR public figures aggravated the situation. Nafa Urbach (NasDem) publicly argued the allowance was “just a housing rental compensation,” adding, “Not every legislator has a home in Jakarta”—comments widely derided as out of touch. She later apologized on Instagram. Ahmad Sahroni (Deputy Chair, Commission III) called those shouting “dissolve the DPR” “the stupidest people in the world”—a remark that turbocharged public anger and the image of parliamentary arrogance.

These controversies stacked public frustration against political elites. As details of the generous allowance spread, diverse civic groups (students, labor) began consolidating. Calls to protest emerged across social channels, including from Aliansi Rakyat Bergerak under the banner “Indonesia Gelap, Revolusi Dimulai” for a major rally on 25 August. Against a backdrop of economic strain and inequality, public anger needed only a spark.

The 25 August Jakarta Demonstration

On Monday, 25 August 2025, the first major rally was held outside the DPR/MPR complex in Senayan, organized by student alliances and civil society under the banner of “Indonesia Gelap, Revolusi Dimulai.” Thousands gathered: students, youth groups, labor unions, and the general public. Core demands: scrap the Rp50 million housing allowance, disclose officials’ remunerations, and revoke planned raises/benefits. Placards reading “DPR = Dewan Pengkhianat Rakyat” and the hashtag #BubarkanDPR reflected profound disillusionment.

Initially peaceful, tensions rose in the late afternoon. Crowds pressed toward the DPR gates as police formed barricades. Shoving escalated; some threw bottles and stones. Police responded with tear gas. The situation turned unruly—a police booth near GBK was vandalized, and crowds dispersed into the night. No deaths were reported on 25 August, but the day signaled anger breaching containment. Police detained hundreds—primarily young people—for questioning.

The allowance issue did not fade after 25 August. On the contrary, videos of forceful policing circulated widely, spurring broader solidarity. National student bodies, such as BEM SI, pledged continued action. A whiff of a new “reformasi” wave hung in the air. Government responses remained generic (“we will listen”), while social media posts sharpened: calls for a general strike, memes lampooning lavish lifestyles, and even whispers of “revolution.” The stage was set for a trigger event.

28 August’s Tragedy: The Ojol Driver’s Death and the Flashpoint

Thursday, 28 August 2025, proved pivotal. A larger, more diverse crowd mobilized in Jakarta, comprising students, laborers, and hundreds of ojol riders. For Ojol, the allowance symbolized grotesque inequality: while drivers scrape by, legislators seek tens of millions monthly. Demands widened: beyond scrapping the allowance, “a comprehensive review of official perks, budget transparency, and pro-people economic policies.”

By evening, clashes flared around Kwitang–Senen. Protesters lobbed projectiles at the Brimob post in Kwitang; police fired volleys of tear gas. Gas filled the area, warning shots echoed, and crowds dispersed into Senen. Vehicles burned.

In the chaos, on Jalan Merdeka Timur (near Tugu Tani), Affan Kurniawan (21)—an ojol rider—was run over by a Brimob armored vehicle. Amateur video captured the horrific moment, with bystanders screaming in horror. The footage went viral within minutes, even before the victim’s identity was confirmed. Affan later died from severe injuries.

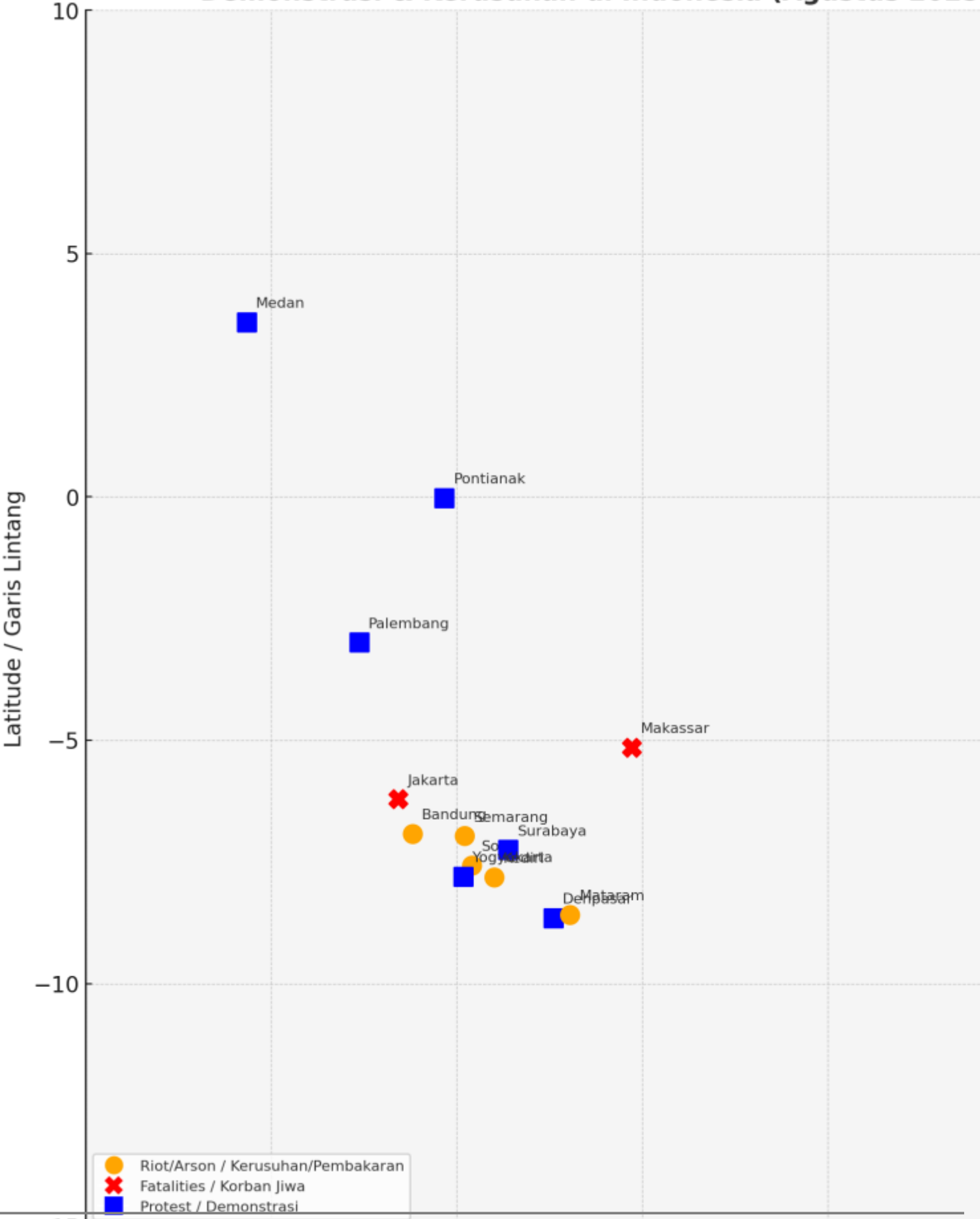
Affan’s death became a national symbol of injustice. Stories spread of a young breadwinner supporting his family. Outrage deepened: an innocent, working-class youth slain by “excessive force”. On 29 August, thousands of ojol riders escorted Affan’s funeral in a massive convoy through central Jakarta—images that went viral and further entrenched the belief that police had acted abusively. National Police Chief Listyo Sigit Prabowo publicly apologized and promised a transparent probe. The authorities immediately placed seven Brimob officers linked to the incident in a 20-day special detention pending legal proceedings. Yet apologies alone did not cool public fury. By the night of 28 August, anger had spread nationwide, tipping into an anarchic phase.

Spillover Nationwide: 29–30 August Riots

The viral video of Affan’s death catalyzed rapid diffusion beyond Jakarta. In hours, calls to mobilize spread through WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok. There were renewed protests in over 20 cities on Friday, August 29, 2025. In many places, protests devolved into chaos and resulted in property destruction. A snapshot:

Demonstrations & Riots in Indonesia (Aug 2025)

Demonstrasi & Kerusuhan di Indonesia (Agustus 2025)



Graphic: Distribution map of protests, 25–29 August 2025, across Indonesian cities. 25/8 concentrated in Jakarta; 28–29/8 extended to Bandung, Medan, Semarang, Solo, Makassar, etc. (Source: ANTARA)

- **Jakarta (epicenter):** Following August 28, crowds continued to grow on August 29. Rage focused on Brimob; the Kwitang Brimob post was attacked again. Police deployed tear gas and water cannons. Unrest spread to Pejompongan and Cikini, with public vehicles set ablaze. Dozens of fires broke out by night: *at least 20 TransJakarta shelters burned, traffic lights & CCTVs smashed, the Pejompongan toll gate torched, Senayan police booth razed*. Reports included *looting at MRT stations (e.g., Istora Senayan) and the destruction of vending machines and cameras*. TNI secured Monas and the State Palace to prevent approaches. Central Jakarta gridlocked; many stayed indoors.
- **Bandung (West Java):** 29 August, a student protest at the Jabar DPRD turned violent. Protesters hurled objects, burned fencing, and fixtures. A *Mess MPR RI* opposite the DPRD was set ablaze. Heritage buildings in Bandung were charred, along with nearby banks and kiosks. Large videotrons smashed; water barriers incinerated. Police detained dozens, including 23 vocational students, who were later released to their parents.
- **Solo & Semarang (Central Java):** Solo suffered severe damage from late 29 August to 30 August. Mobs toppled gates and torched the DPRD Surakarta and the Secretariat building. In Semarang, thousands rallied around Simpang Lima and the Governor's office, spilling toward the Central Java DPRD; parts were damaged,, but fire crews contained it. The pre-incident in Pekalongan resulted in the arrest of 65 youths carrying Molotovs.
- **Surabaya, Kediri & East Java:** Surabaya saw daytime vigils, but Kediri erupted by night. DPRD City and Regency buildings and a county office were burned around midnight on 29/8. Fires were doused by dawn. These incidents indicate that tier-two cities have also become flashpoints.
- **Medan & North Sumatra:** 28 August rallies by labor and youth at the Governor's office proceeded with minor scuffles. No primary arson reported. Padang and Bandar Lampung saw campus-led marches on August 30, which were dispersed before escalating. Palembang prepared for a 1 September rally, with large joint TNI–Polri patrols to deter unrest.
- **Makassar (South Sulawesi):** Makassar reported the highest number of fatalities. Tensions at the Sulsel DPRD escalated; by night, the main assembly building was engulfed in flames. Three perished trapped inside—reported as *honorary staff* working late. Outside, one ojol rider was beaten to death by a mob on Jl. Urip Sumoharjo, suspected (without proof) of being an intelligence provocateur. Four dead in total made Makassar the deadliest locus. Police and government vehicles were torched.

- Denpasar (Bali): On August 30, hundreds rallied at Polda Bali. Demands mirrored Jakarta's (full probe of Affan's death; abolish the allowance). After shoves with police, tensions cooled; no primary arson. Tourists were advised to avoid rally zones.
- Mataram (West Nusa Tenggara): On 30 August, the NTB DPRD in Mataram was burned. The main chamber and caucus offices were destroyed. Looting occurred amid the blaze—*computers, furniture, and even paintings were taken*. Losses were estimated in the billions of rupiah.
- Kalimantan & Eastern Indonesia: A small gathering in Pontianak on 30/8 was dispersed quickly. Yogyakarta remained calm; the governor, Sultan HB X, personally engaged with student leaders, defusing tensions. One Amikom student reportedly died suddenly after joining a 28/8 rally, prompting an internal campus review. The Eastern regions (Maluku, Papua) saw symbolic solidarity actions without major incidents.

Across locations, targets were consistent: symbols of “elite power,” particularly DPR/DPRD buildings and officials' residences. > 36 parliament buildings were damaged or burned. Beyond fatalities (5–6) and mass injuries, material losses were heavy: in Jakarta alone, numerous transit assets were disabled, crippling TransJakarta and MRT services. As of August 31, more than 990 were detained in Jakarta, and hundreds were detained elsewhere. Police claimed many detainees were “rioters”—some carrying blades, Molotovs, and even crude firearms.

PROTESTS & RIOTS IN INDONESIA (AUGUST 2025) DEMONSTRASI & KERUSUHAN DI INDONESIA (AGUSTUS 2025)

- Protest / Demonstrasi
- Riot/Arson / Perusuhan/Pembakaran
- Fatalities
Korban Jiwa



Targets of Rage: Politicians' Homes and the Hunt for "Intellectual Authors"

A striking feature was that mobs targeted the private residences of public officials. Not only parliament buildings, but DPR members' homes became focal points. The most prominent: Ahmad Sahroni's house in Tanjung Priok, North Jakarta, was stormed and looted on 30 August. Crowds ransacked his luxury residence; personal belongings, electronics, and documents were tossed to the street. A Lexus in his garage was smashed. Having labeled critics "stupid," Sahroni became a lightning rod.

Other DPR celebrity figures were also hit. Eko Patrio's residence was reported looted, and Uya Kuya's home in South Jakarta was overrun—he lamented not the goods but the theft of his pet cats. The raids show personalized public hatred toward lawmakers perceived as emblematic of privilege. Reports even circulated that four DPR public figures (Sahroni, Nafa Urbach, Eko, and Uya) would be “withdrawn” by parties under public pressure—though formal announcements were pending.

Meanwhile, authorities posited the presence of “intellectual authors” exploiting the situation. Former BIN chief A.M. Hendropriyono declared he knows the mastermind behind the 25 August unrest—allegedly a foreign non-state actor with vast influence, manipulating public opinion via local proxies. He named no names, but speculation swirled about transnational networks with resources to orchestrate chaos.

Other security observers concurred: the synchronized arsons (DPRD buildings torched across multiple regions) looked too structured to be purely spontaneous. There were indications of coordinated provocations aimed at destabilizing the situation. A former Commission I lawmaker wrote in *Rakyat Merdeka*: when peaceful protests escalate into chaos with casualties, public attention shifts from reform demands to horizontal conflict—suggesting a deliberate scenario; the state must identify and arrest the masterminds.

As of early September, no definitive proof tied a specific group. The government treaded carefully; President Prabowo described parts of the unrest as “terroristic” and “seditious” without elaboration. Police detained individuals dressed in anarcho iconography reminiscent of 2020 anti-omnibus protests. Activists denied orchestration: BEM SI's leader stressed that their movement was genuine, disavowing looters; Liga Mahasiswa Demokrasi framed the root problem as oligarchy and inequality, extending beyond the allowance issue.

The plausible reality: dual tracks—authentic mass protests and opportunistic violent cells attaching themselves. Law enforcement focused on the latter—probing, for instance, who initiated arsons in Solo, Kediri, and Makassar. If evidence surfaces linking radical networks or political spoilers, it will be a pivotal security finding.

Security and Government Responses

In response to the escalating unrest, authorities took action on several fronts:

- **Police Apology & Investigation:** As noted, the National Police Chief apologized for Affan Kurniawan's death. Seven Brimob members received expedited disciplinary measures (20-day special placement) pending criminal process. The armored vehicle driver claimed panic under attack; police vowed transparency. In Makassar, TNI and police localized the DPRD blaze, with Pangdam XIV clarifying that three died inside (not four). The TNI Commander ordered regional commands to support the police with extensive joint patrols in hotspots such as Palembang, Bandung, and Jakarta.
- **Force Posture & Vital Asset Protection:** On August 31, President Prabowo ordered full readiness for the TNI and Polri. In Jakarta, thousands of troops guarded the Palace, the DPR, and the homes of officials. Ministers and political figures removed official plates for safe movement.

Provinces fortified government buildings; Siaga 1 status was applied in DKI and select regions. Brimob units were redeployed from calmer areas to reinforce DKI, West Java, Central Java.

- **Political Concessions: U-turn on Allowances & Travel:** To address core demands, President Prabowo convened DPR and party leaders on 31 August. Outcome: all parties agreed to revoke the Rp50 million housing allowance. Prabowo stated DPR leadership would rescind controversial policies, including foreign junkets. The allowance was canceled before implementation. Additionally, all overseas DPR trips were frozen indefinitely. Prabowo also canceled a planned state visit to China to focus on the crisis.
- **Hard-Line Messaging Against Violence:** In an August 31 address, Prabowo signaled empathy toward genuine grievances but condemned violence and vandalism. He warned that the protest-turned-riot veered toward “treasonous” acts. He directed firm action against the destruction of public facilities, looting of homes, and economic centers. References to “terrorism” and “sedition” suggested potential use of anti-terror and ITE statutes—a strong deterrent, though Amnesty International Indonesia criticized the rhetoric as chilling to free expression.
- **Engagement & DPR Reform Signals:** The government opened channels for grievances. The DPR speaker announced the formation of a public input task group. Ministries were told to receive citizen delegations peacefully. Senior figures urged deep DPR self-reform. Former Coordinating Minister Mahfud MD publicly supported student protests “100 percent,” urging Parliament to truly change.
- **Information Operations & Platform Coordination:** Recognizing the force of social media, Kominfo summoned platforms (TikTok, Meta) regarding content related to riots. TikTok suspended live streaming in Indonesia for several days, citing a need to curb violent broadcasts. X (Twitter) experienced access disruptions on 28 August—netizens suspected throttling, which the government denied. Authorities ran countercampaigns, such as debunking the claim of looting at Atrium Senen.
- In their meeting with Ojol community leaders, the police offered Affan’s family scholarships and condolences. In regions, leaders like Sultan HB X engaged students to avert escalation. NU and Muhammadiyah urged restraint and led national prayers. Campuses issued advisories and temporary schedule pauses for safety reviews.

This combined calibrated coercion and concessions cooled tensions by early September. The mooted 1 September “nationwide action” did not materialize on the feared scale; scattered rallies remained peaceful. With the core demand met (allowance canceled), student mobilization gradually receded—though root issues persisted.

Social Media’s Role: Diffusion and Public Opinion

The online sphere profoundly shaped the crisis:

- **Viral Triggers:** Affan's death spread via X, TikTok, and Instagram within minutes. Hashtags #JusticeForAffan and #AparatPembunuh trended on 29 August; hundreds of thousands of tweets condemned police conduct. Claims that Affan was retrieving a dropped phone when run over fueled outrage. Platforms primarily organized a mass ojol escort for Affan's funeral the following day. Social media accelerated solidarity beyond what on-the-ground logistics could achieve.
- **Popular Hashtags & Narratives:** Since August 25, #BubarkanDPR, #DPRTamak, and #RevolusiDimulai have surged. After Sahroni's insult, #OrangTololSedunia trended in ironic reversal. TikTok's short videos explaining official pay/benefit breakdowns vs. minimum wages educated younger audiences, channeling informed anger.
- **Influencers & Celebrities:** Prominent voices weighed in. Nicholas Saputra posted "Mundur, Pak.", addressed to the police chief on X, which was widely shared and framed by media as a peak of online anger. Many others—Joko Anwar, Desta, Iqbaal Ramadhan, Jefri Nichol, and Anya Geraldine—spoke up for demonstrators and Affan's family. Raffi Ahmad offered condolences on IG; Ayu Ting Ting and Lucinta Luna voiced explicit support for students. Sherina Munaf and others joined animal rescue efforts for pets trapped in officials' looted homes. Their participation normalized the protest cause across demographics.
- **Digital Mobilization:** WhatsApp/Telegram broadcast lists mobilize crowds fast. TikTok content with #DPRI and #Revolusi2025 reached millions of views. Crowdfunding for the injured raised significant sums within a day. Facebook livestreams featured citizen-journalist coverage (some of which was later removed due to violent content). YouTube became an archive of multi-city footage.
- **Misinformation & Controls:** Amid information floods, hoaxes circulated. Police quickly debunked some (e.g., Atrium Senen looting). Yet fear-mongering claims about sectarian motives or inflated death tolls stirred panic. X's access issues during peak clashes sparked censorship accusations. Some praised TikTok's live suspension as a safety measure, while others criticized it for limiting transparency.
- **Public Opinion:** Notably, online sentiment largely favored the demonstrators—unlike many polarizing issues. Surveys by news portals showed >80% support to scrap DPR allowances and punish those responsible for Affan's death. Attempts to frame protests as "opposition plots" were typically refuted. Official DPR accounts and some legislators faced broad backlash. Even after the apology, the police chief continued to face sustained calls to resign. On 1 September, he stated his readiness to accept any presidential decision regarding his position—a testament to the influence of digital pressure on elite signaling.

In short, social media served as both a megaphone and a magnifier, compelling rapid policy reactions. Open information enhanced accountability, while misinformation posed risks; without the viral video, Affan's case might have remained obscure.

Impacts and Strategic Implications

Immediate impacts were substantial. Security-wise, Indonesia experienced the most significant civil escalation since 1998, according to many observers. Official fatalities: five—one in Jakarta (Affan), three in Makassar (DPRD blaze), one in Makassar (mob beating)—with some reports suggesting six. Hundreds were injured, including dozens of officers. Economically, investor confidence wobbled: on August 29, the IDX plunged, and the rupiah weakened, with Reuters calling it a “steep selloff.” The IDX fell ~3% intraday; the rupiah neared Rp15,500 per USD. Tourists are worried, and several countries have issued advisories urging their citizens to avoid crowds in Indonesia. Damages to public assets, business disruptions, and emergency deployments likely totaled trillions of rupiah.

Politically, the wave posed “the most significant challenge to President Prabowo's government” to date. With little formal parliamentary opposition, the streets formed a *de facto* counterweight—a cross-class coalition of students, labor, and gig workers demanding tangible change. Even with the allowance revoked, anti-oligarchy and anti-inequality sentiments endure. Failure to implement visible reforms (curbing elite perks, tackling corruption, improving wages) risks recurrence.

For the DPR RI, reputational damage was profound. The cry of “dissolving the DPR” gained unusual mainstream support. Raids on lawmakers' homes signaled a significant decline in moral legitimacy. Parliament must adopt structural reforms, including transparency, ethics, moderation of lifestyle displays, and proactive pro-people legislation, or face electoral consequences and potential systemic reform pressures.

From a security perspective, agencies must review their early warning capacities. How did synchronized unrest erupt across regions? Was it purely self-organized or coordinated beyond visibility? If Hendropriyono's foreign non-state actor claim holds, counterintelligence must adapt. Expect intensified SOCMINT/OSINT monitoring—carefully balanced to avoid overreach that compromises civil liberties. Prosecutorial choices (anti-terror/ITE) will signal the doctrinal stance as we advance.

Regional/international optics: Neighbors and investors watched closely. Mismanagement could dent Indonesia's investment attractiveness and diplomatic momentum (Prabowo's China visit cancellation underscored priorities). Conversely, effective de-escalation, combined with credible reforms, could rebuild global confidence.

Strategic takeaways:

1. Social inequality and accumulated public frustration have reached volatile thresholds; perceived elite self-dealing can trigger swift unrest.
2. Social media is a double-edged sword—vital for legitimate mobilization yet an accelerant for disorder and rumor. Intelligence must track real-time digital dynamics.

3. Institutional trust deficits (DPR, Police) are acute; rebuilding requires internal reforms and transparent communication.
4. Patterns suggest organized provocations in physical riots (timing, targets); inter-regional investigations are necessary to confirm or refute networked orchestration.
5. First-year post-transition vulnerability is real; this was a formative stress test of presidential crisis management.

Conclusion

The anarchic surge of late August 2025 was a historic social eruption rooted in inequality and elite insensitivity. The Rp50 million allowance became a rallying symbol, uniting disparate groups. Affan Kurniawan's death crystallized moral outrage and accelerated nationwide diffusion via social media. Over five critical days (25–30 August), Indonesia saw widespread civil disorder—parliament buildings torched, public infrastructure wrecked, and officials' homes raided.

Authorities blended firmness and concessions: the allowance was revoked, public apologies were issued, and full security posture was deployed. From a security intelligence perspective, it appears that organized groups are exploiting real protests—either local radical groups or foreign connections—so it's essential to investigate this thoroughly. From a strategic intelligence perspective, the episode highlights the need for policy resets, including curbing elite privileges, addressing inequality, and implementing institutional reform, to prevent future flare-ups.

The crisis also demonstrated that digital public pressure can prompt policy reversals within days. Future statecraft must integrate digital-era engagement and early warning. Obfuscation or dismissiveness will boomerang. Transparency, dialogue, and tangible reform are the path to restoring trust.

Ultimately, the August 2025 protests are a stern warning: Indonesia's democracy needs repair. When citizens perceive a betrayal of their representation, they will mobilize. Their demands extend beyond allowances to justice and propriety. Intelligence work must encompass the detection of social signals, not only complex threats. If stakeholders learn and act, Indonesia can emerge stronger—re-stitching public trust and proving a resilient, maturing democracy. As the adage goes, social justice is the bedrock of peace.

The state must now deliver consistent accountability against violent actors (whether rogue officers or organized rioters) and in policy corrections. If pursued sincerely, Indonesia can exit this crisis with renewed legitimacy.

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