

Handling of Demonstrations by the Indonesian National Police: Challenges, Consequences, and the Urgency of Reform to Restore Public Trust

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“ The reform of the Indonesian National Police (Polri) institution is an urgent necessity to rebuild public trust. Measures such as enhancing transparency, providing human rights-based law enforcement training, and coordinating with independent institutions or even the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) in specific situations can be part of this effort. Fair, accountable, and procedurally compliant law enforcement is key to improving Polri’s image in the eyes of the public. Let us support our police” .

Introduction .

The Indonesian National Police (Polri) has faced sharp criticism for its management of demonstrations, which often fails to adhere to proper procedures, resulting in a significant decline in public trust. Former Head of Polri’s Criminal Investigation Agency (Kabareskrim), Commissioner General (Ret.) Susno Duadji, noted that public confidence in Polri has reached a low point. Data from Amnesty International Indonesia, documenting thousands of arrests of demonstrators, underscores this erosion of trust. While Polri bears the consequences of declining public confidence, their challenging task is driven by the noble goal of maintaining national security. This statement examines the issues surrounding Polri’s approach to demonstrations, its impact on their institutional image, and proposed reforms, including potential collaboration with the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI).

Decline in Public Trust and Its Consequences for Polri

In an interview on Kompas TV’s Sapa Indonesia Malam on Wednesday, September 3, 2025, Susno Duadji emphasized that the erosion of public trust in Polri is a stark reality, not merely a concern. “It’s not just a continuous decline or a worry—it’s currently at a low point,” he stated. The primary cause is Polri’s management of demonstrations, often perceived as not adhering to proper procedures. Demonstrations, a constitutional right in a democratic state, should be respected when lawful. However, arrests lacking clear justification or proper procedures have fueled negative public perceptions.

Amnesty International Indonesia’s data supports this critique: Polri arrested 3,095 individuals during demonstrations across various regions, with 1,438 arrests in Jakarta alone. Other regions, including West Java, Central Java, East Java, and Bali, reported hundreds of arrests. Usman Hamid, Executive Director of Amnesty International Indonesia, noted that many arrests failed to meet legal

standards, such as lacking arrest warrants or adequate investigations. The tragic death of Affan Kurniawan, an online motorcycle taxi driver, during a demonstration further damaged Polri's image. This erosion of trust has placed significant pressure on Polri, potentially undermining their legitimacy as law enforcers, despite their critical role in ensuring national security and stability.

Polri's Dilemma in Maintaining National Security .

Polri faces a complex challenge in managing demonstrations, particularly in tense situations. They bear the significant responsibility of maintaining public order and national security, often requiring decisive action to prevent chaos. Simultaneously, they must uphold citizens' constitutional rights to express their opinions. This tension frequently sparks conflict, especially when demonstrations are perceived as disruptive by authorities. However, excessive measures, such as mass arrests or overuse of force, worsen the situation and deepen public distrust.

Usman Hamid criticized Polri's tendency to blame demonstrators or activists without conducting internal evaluations, emphasizing the need for transparent and accountable law enforcement. Similarly, Susno Duadji stressed that arrests must be justified and follow proper legal procedures, including issuing arrest warrants and conducting thorough investigations. Failure to adhere to these standards risks perceptions of arbitrary action, damaging Polri's reputation, even when their efforts aim to safeguard the nation.

Proposed Solutions and Reforms .

To address this crisis of trust, Susno Duadji proposed that Polri collaborate with independent organizations, such as Amnesty International Indonesia, to review arrest cases. Such cooperation could distinguish legitimate arrests from incorrect or unjustified ones, reducing the risk of wrongful detentions. Additionally, law enforcement training rooted in human rights principles must be strengthened to ensure police personnel respect citizens' constitutional rights.

Another proposal involves institutional cooperation with the TNI to manage complex demonstration scenarios. In critical situations, such collaboration could support national stability. However, it must be strictly regulated to prevent overlapping roles and ensure respect for human rights, avoiding perceptions of a militaristic approach to handling demonstrations.

The Urgency of Institutional Reform for Polri .

Statements from Susno Duadji, data from Amnesty International Indonesia, and the impact of declining public trust highlight the urgent need for reform in Polri's approach to demonstrations. Key reform measures include:

1. **Strengthening Transparency and Accountability:** Polri must ensure all law enforcement actions, including arrests, are well-documented and justifiable, with clear communication to the public.

2. Promoting Human Rights-Based Training: Training focused on respecting constitutional rights must be integral to police education.

3. Engaging Independent Organizations: Collaboration with entities like Amnesty International Indonesia can help evaluate and refine Polri's approach to demonstrations.

4. Coordinating with TNI in Critical Situations: Cooperation with the TNI may be considered in critical scenarios, governed by clear mechanisms to prevent misuse of authority.

Conclusion .

Polri's management of demonstrations, often perceived as improper, has significantly eroded public trust. Mass arrests and tragic incidents, such as the death of Affan Kurniawan, underscore the urgent need for reform. While Polri faces the consequences of declining confidence, their vital role in safeguarding national security remains undeniable.

By adopting transparent, accountable, and human rights-based law enforcement practices, and exploring collaboration with independent organizations and the TNI in critical situations, Polri can rebuild its public image. These reforms will not only restore trust but also strengthen Polri's role as a professional and respected institution in a democratic state.

Yayasan Pendidikan Indonesia's Position .

Yayasan Pendidikan Indonesia, as an organization with special consultative status at ECOSOC, United Nations, strongly supports sustained collaboration between Polri and the TNI to ensure national security. This cooperation should extend beyond operations to include preventive measures, such as public education through in-person and digital platforms. In critical situations, Polri should not bear the negative consequences alone while other institutions merely criticize without contributing.