

A Wave of Protests in Jakarta and Signs of Dissatisfaction with the Prabowo Administration

(Translated)

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A wave of demonstrations has intensified in Jakarta throughout August and into early September 2026. For instance, on August 18, student groups organized an event at the Hotel Indonesia Roundabout under the banner “Seizing Independence.” They highlighted issues such as the prices of basic necessities and fuel, the need to combat corruption, and the evaluation of various government policies. Similar actions had taken place the previous June, involving protests against diverse government policies—including economic inequality, corruption, the weak rupiah exchange rate, rising fuel prices, tax burdens on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and opposition to the Free Nutritious Meals and the Red and White Village Cooperatives (KDMP).

A subsequent wave of protests occurred on August 27 around the House of Representatives building, involving various groups with distinct demands. One group advocated for anti-corruption measures and urged the passage of an asset forfeiture law, while another focused on economic issues and the implementation of government programs. What began as a peaceful demonstration escalated into rioting after some protesters remained at the site; authorities subsequently took security measures against individuals implicated in acts of violence and vandalism.

A key issue driving this unrest is the perception of ineffective anti-corruption efforts and a lack of accountability in the management of state assets. Demanding the immediate passage of an asset forfeiture law is a key aspect of this agenda, as the public wants the state to possess a stronger legal tool to recover assets derived from corruption.

Beyond corruption, economic issues—such as the rising cost of basic necessities, purchasing power, wages, employment, and various economic burdens that fuel unrest—are major concerns for society under the current administration. The situation is further complicated by the impact of the Iran-US conflict, which has driven up the price of unsubsidized fuel and plastics. Additionally, the depreciation of the Indonesian rupiah against the dollar places further strain on the state budget. Indonesia also relies heavily on debt and imports a wide range of goods from abroad.

Instead of focusing on addressing strategic issues, the government is utilizing its resources to fund the President’s signature campaign promise—the Free Nutritious Meals. Costing between 400 billion and one trillion rupiah daily, the program is viewed by many as a waste of public funds. Corruption has also been exposed within the program, resulting in estimated losses of 10.5 trillion rupiah. Furthermore, many of the program’s providers are drawn from the inner circles of power—including the police, the military, and pro-government political parties—and stand to make substantial profits, ranging from 6 million to approximately 1.8 billion rupiah annually. Regarding education, Indonesia continues to grapple with numerous challenges, such as teacher welfare and inadequate school infrastructure—including poor road access to schools in remote areas. These issues have prompted the public and protesters to call for a review of the free school meals program.

The strengthening of the military and rising authoritarianism are also central themes in various student protests. Demonstrations across Indonesia have frequently been marred by obstruction and repressive tactics employed by security forces against protesters, including the

arrest of numerous activists. Prabowo often accuses protesters of treason, labeling them as foreign agents, members of groups with ulterior motives, or agitators driven by external interests.

Meanwhile, the Indonesian military has expanded its role by establishing 100 regional development battalions in 2025, with plans to eventually cover every regency and city in Indonesia by 2029. These battalions are tasked with overseeing government programs in sectors such as agriculture, livestock, fisheries, and health. This expanded military role has been facilitated by plans to revise the law governing the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) under the Prabowo administration—a move the public views as a betrayal of the reform agenda, arguing that the military's mandate should be limited to national defense and security rather than involvement in managing civilian affairs. Prabowo's policies are seen as paving the way for a return to the authoritarian military-backed "New Order" regime that held power for over thirty years, from 1966 to 1998.

The issues raised regarding events throughout 2026 mirror those that emerged in 2025—following the President's inauguration in October 2024—ranging from the "Dark Indonesia" movement in early February 2025 to widespread demonstrations across the country in August 2025, culminating in major protests on August 28–30, 2025. What began as a grievance regarding perks and allowances for House of Representatives members evolved into a much broader critique of the political elite and state institutions. Demands included parliamentary reform, budget transparency, the eradication of corruption, the passage of an asset forfeiture law, political party reform, an end to violence against protesters, and restrictions on the Indonesian military's interference in civil affairs.

Routine demonstrations by students and the public in Indonesia reflect growing dissatisfaction with the government of Prabowo Subianto and his deputy, Gibran Rakabuming Raka. This aligns with the findings of the latest survey on the prices of basic necessities, employment trends, and income uncertainty—conducted by Tempo Data Science between July 31 and August 11, 2026—which showed that only 37 percent of Indonesians are satisfied with the government's performance, while 62 percent of respondents expressed dissatisfaction.

On a scale of 1 to 10, the government's performance received a score of only 5.7. This level of satisfaction has dropped significantly since the December 2025 survey, when public satisfaction stood at 75 percent; it fell to 58 percent in March 2026 and further declined to 37 percent in August 2026. Factors contributing to public dissatisfaction with the government's performance include the cost of basic necessities, employment challenges, and income uncertainty.

As the Prabowo Subianto administration marks its two-year milestone, ongoing measures suggest a strong hope that the regime can formulate policies that benefit society at large, rather than policies serving only a select few or elites close to power. These measures are likely to persist throughout the remainder of the current administration's term, particularly given the absence of any serious intent on the part of the government to demonstrate a genuine commitment to reforming or improving the policies already in place.