

# **Voices from the Uprising in Indonesia**

**Affan Kurniawan Lives on in the Streets**

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A wave of protest exploded across Indonesia at the end of August 2025. In this report, we present an interview with an imprisoned Indonesian anarchist author along with various statements from anarchist groups that have reached English-speaking outlets since the uprising began.

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Following weeks of protests across Indonesia in response to austerity measures, demonstrators gathered in massive numbers the week of August 25 to accuse Indonesia's political elite of callousness and corruption.

The Indonesian government provides parliamentary representatives with a monthly salary of 100 million rupiah (around \$6,081)—roughly 30 times the minimum salary in Jakarta, where the country's highest wages can be found.<sup>1</sup> Anger erupted when reports circulated that representatives were receiving an additional 50 million rupiah every month as a housing allowance. This news broke in the midst of intense inflation, a new round of austerity measures, and worsening poverty.

Labor unions, anarchists, students, leftists, youth, and other protesters filled the streets the week of August 25. They experienced harsh repression at the hands of police serving the current president, Prabowo Subianto, who previously served as minister of defense. On August 28, an armored car from the National Police's Mobile Brigade struck and killed Affan Kurniawan, a 21-year-old delivery worker who was making his way to deliver food.

In response to the murder of Affan, delivery workers, anarchists, and youth from a range of other demographics erupted in revolt. Demonstrators ransacked multiple police stations, burned and looted politicians' homes, and torched government buildings.

This situation forced the prime minister to skip China's Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit. The government has suggested that it might cut some of the benefits afforded to politicians and some of austerity measures that sparked the uprising. However, President Prabowo Subianto has doubled down on repression and called in the military, resulting in at least six deaths—including a student beaten to death by police in Yogyakarta, Java, and a pedicab driver who died from tear gas exposure in Solo, Java. The full death toll remains unknown.

Ruled by Dutch colonialism until 1949, Indonesia remains bitterly polarized, with tremendous disparities in resources and power; in the 1960s, violence targeting members and alleged sympathizers of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) claimed at least hundreds of thousands of lives. The contemporary anarchist movement emerged in the late 1980s, thanks in part to the efforts of punk bands. The police introduced an "anti-anarchy" division in 2011, and in multiple incidents, those perceived to be anarcho-punks have been kidnapped and incarcerated in state-sanctioned re-education camps. Nonetheless, the anarchist movement has continued to grow in the face of adversity.

With unprecedented state repression taking place across the planet, the brave actions of the rebels in Indonesia are deeply inspiring for those who reject the capitalist world order. Demonstrators in Indonesia have reported **a variety of forms of crackdowns on digital communication**, and these are likely to intensify if the conflict continues to escalate. We hope that this preliminary report can draw attention to the situation, encouraging people elsewhere around the world to learn more and act in solidarity.

Affan Kurniawan will not be forgotten, nor his killers forgiven. Solidarity with the courageous ones ensuring this in the streets.

—Anarchists in solidarity with the uprising in Indonesia

## A Conversation with Anarchist Prisoner and Author, Bima

Bima is an anarchist writer, translator, and independent researcher from Indonesia who has been imprisoned since 2021. He remains active behind bars as a member of an anarchist federation. He is also the founder of the do-it-yourself publishing house called **Pustaka Catut**, and author of the book *Anarchy in Alifuru: The History of State-*

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<sup>1</sup> There is no standard minimum salary in Indonesia; it varies by region. However, according to **ASEANBreifing**, the minimum standard in 2025 is roughly between 2,053,777.8 rupiah (\$125) and 5,536,984.96 (\$337), depending on where you live.

*less Societies in the Maluku Islands* published by Minor Compositions. You can support Bima via the **Patreon** and learn more from a previously active FireFund campaign for them.

We conducted this interview with Bima in the first days of September 2025.

**How would you like to introduce yourself?**

I am a writer, a prisoner, and a member of an anarchist federation that chooses to remain anonymous for security reasons at this scary time.

**Can you provide some context on the current uprising?**

This wave of rebellion starting in late August 2025 was caused by the accumulation of anger over various political and economic issues. There was no single issue. But everything escalated due to massive increases in house taxes across the region due to the government's budget deficit.

At the same time, members of parliament received a tenfold increase in wages. This was exacerbated by officials' often arbitrary statements. For example, the Regent of Pati (the politician in charge of overseeing local government, policies, and public services in the Pati Regency, Central Java, Indonesia) said, "that taxes would not be reduced, even if a mass demonstration of 50,000 people took place."

Pati was the first city to explode with a turnout of around 100,000 people on August 10, 2025. Protests against the tax increase spread to Bone (in South Sulawesi Province), then to other cities. During a demonstration on August 28 in Jakarta, a delivery worker for an online food delivery app was killed after being run over by a police vehicle during protests. The following day, demonstrations spread to many cities, and they continue to this day as I write you.

At least six civilians have been killed directly as a result of police repression so far, several officials' homes were looted, and half a dozen House of Representatives offices were partially burned or burned to the ground. We were confident that this rebellion would subside, but the public's anger did not.

**What types of groups have been involved in the uprising? And to what extent are they unified?**

There are many organizations, networks, and groups formulating demands. One could say that each city even has its own unique demands.

Generally there are two "revolutionary" demands: the first from the socialist party of Indonesia, Perserikatan Sosialis (PS), and the other, a loose, informal, and decentralized network that issued the **Declaration of the Indonesian Federalist Revolution 2025**, which calls for the dissolution of the unitary state and the DPR (Indonesia's House of Representatives) system and its replacement with a Democratic Confederation of thousands of people's councils for the implementation of direct democracy. Ahmad Sahroni, a member of the House of Representatives (DPR) from the National Democratic (NasDem) Party, called these demands "stupid." This resulted in his house in North Jakarta being attacked and looted on August 30.

Insurrectionary anarchists, individualists, and post-leftists focus on attacks and street clashes, calling for the destruction of the state and capitalism, but without bothering with a platform or a program of demands that simply calls for the reform of what already exists.

Generally, there is no united front, but we avoid excessive ideological sectarianism.

Unfortunately, there are also progressive liberals with more reformist demands, such as the **17+8 demand** (a "pro-democracy" activist slogan calling for reformist demands to be met by September 5, 2025). This group is highly influenced by liberal online influencers urging the protests to stop. These influencers have gone so far as to claim that the protesters will be responsible if the military declares martial law due to the resistance demonstrated in the streets (typical recuperative centrist gaslighting and demonization of revolutionary resistance and organizations). Fortunately, all the left-wing and anarchist elements agree that the protests should escalate. We don't know what will happen yet, as this discourse war is still ongoing.

Honestly, there are too many groups involved in the uprising to offer a simple answer. The entire left-wing and anarchist movements from various organizations took to the streets, but there was no united front. In each city, progressive elements of society, whether university students, labor unions, or even schoolchildren, consolidated their actions. Some actions were organic and emerged as uncoordinated community initiatives, such as the attacks on police posts and stations, in which several of them were burned.

**How are anarchists contributing to the uprising?**

I'm a revolutionary pessimist, influenced by the discourse of anarcho-nihilism. But I still advocate social revolution because there is no empty social space. Indonesia is the most multicultural archipelago in the world, with thousands of ethnicities and languages. A discourse of separatism is surfacing in some regions. Some nobles from ancient monarchies are pushing for revivalism. There are also authoritarian Islamic fundamentalists and jihadists who want a caliphate in the country. So I think it's impossible for revolutionaries not to offer their program as an alternative to all these bad possibilities. The wave of rebellion is a symptom of the impending great division, and anarchists must take a role. Otherwise, the choices are bad. Very, very bad.

**What do you think will come of this uprising? And what do you see for the future of the anarchist movement in Indonesia?**

I'm pessimistic about this. We've established ourselves in several cities, but we're relatively weak overall, even though we're fundamentally quite militant.

We're influenced by the Uruguayan approach of **Espesifismo**, which involves two-tier organizing. This means that in addition to joining political organizations, we also join grassroots organizations like labor unions, student organizations, indigenous organizations, and so on.

We still use the classic definition of revolution, but this requires a strong people's organizational base to make it happen. Despite this, the recent uprisings have been repeating themselves like a routine cycle since **2019**. This excites us because it means we must push ourselves to keep pace with the popular uprisings and the will of the masses. But we must grow and increase our militancy to remain relevant with the pace of people's rage.

I don't believe there will be reform unless there is a violent overthrow of power and the incumbent promises reform. The current ruling class has formed a bloated coalition that embraces all of its former opposition and "gives them a piece of the pie." So far, we are the only members of the informal, decentralized anti-authoritarian network calling for the president and vice president to be removed. The problem is, there hasn't been any demand for their removal. So, reform will still take time, and an anarchist revolution is impossible due to organizational weaknesses and the absence of progressive labor unions capable of leading a national strike.

However, the people's organic demand to dissolve parliament through the hashtag #bubarkanDPR ["disband the DPR"], the involvement of a more diverse mass of people in the protests (Indonesia is known for romanticizing student vanguardism in 1965 and 1998), and the use of violence, represent progress that would have been unimaginable a decade ago. Anarchists have played a crucial role in this. Still, I personally don't think the anarchist movement will lead to an anarchist revolution, even if the opportunity exists. But it could exert a huge libertarian influence through a united front working within established groups. For example, the proposal for a revolutionary democratic confederalism, which is actually in line with classical anarchist proposals, would likely be accepted by the entire spectrum of the existing left and separatist national liberation movements in some regions. Maybe.

The 2020 protests against the Omnibus Law were also significant, but this year's uprising is the bloodiest, the most devastating, and the most engaging (we saw a significant amount of radicalization among elements of society). It still hasn't surpassed the escalation seen during the fall of Suharto's militaristic regime in 1998. However, I'm confident that could happen soon.

Unfortunately, I've been warning since yesterday that when the awaited moment arrives, we won't be ready for revolution, even though we will respond mainly by participating in street battles.

**What are ways people outside Indonesia can act in solidarity?**

Demonstrating outside of embassies is one way people can show their support. Additionally, funding for anti-repression efforts is and will continue to be critical. The **FireFund for the Indonesian Safe House Network** is an active project that donors from abroad can give to. The project helps with the procurement of safe houses for revolutionary individuals and offers financial support to individuals facing repression, to political prisoners, and to prisoner unions.

## **Other Voices from Indonesia**

In addition to interviewing Bima, on September 2, we received the following report from Reza Rizkia in Jakarta:

The wave of demonstrations that began on August 25, 2025, across Indonesia continues to unfold, leaving behind a trail of tragedy and unrest. What started as a protest against the proposed Rp50 million monthly housing allowance for members of parliament has grown into a nationwide movement with broader demands: the evaluation of parliamentary performance, police reform, and an end to excessive use of force by security forces.

On August 28, tensions escalated after a motorcycle taxi driver, Affan Kurniawan, was struck and killed by a Mobile Brigade (Brimob) tactical vehicle in Bendungan Hilir, Jakarta. Footage of the incident spread rapidly across social media, sparking solidarity protests from students and online driver communities. The tragedy became a turning point, expanding the scale of demonstrations both in the capital and across the country.

Violence soon spread to other major cities. In Makassar, protesters set fire to the regional parliament building (DPRD), killing three staff members trapped inside. In Solo, a rickshaw driver named Sumari died in clashes, while in Yogyakarta, student Rheza Sendy Pratama was killed during a demonstration outside the regional police headquarters. Another victim, Rusmadiansyah, an online driver, was beaten to death by a mob after being accused of being an intelligence agent. Some reports also point to additional casualties, including a vocational school student in Pati. In total, at least seven to eight people have lost their lives amid the unrest through the end of August.

The government has responded with condolences. President Prabowo Subianto ordered an open investigation, while the National Police Chief and Jakarta Police Chief issued public apologies for the casualties. Seven Brimob officers linked to Affan Kurniawan's death have been detained and face legal proceedings. Still, public anger shows little sign of abating.

As of September 2, demonstrations remain ongoing in several regions with sustained intensity. Thousands of protesters have been detained over the past week, peaking on August 29 when more than 1,300 people were arrested in a single day. At the same time, the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) reported cases of violence and interference against journalists covering the protests.

The late-August demonstrations mark one of the largest protest waves in recent years in Indonesia. With the death toll mounting, mass arrests, and widespread property damage, the public now awaits whether the government and parliament will respond to citizens' demands with genuine reforms—or risk allowing the crisis to deepen further.

When the uprising began to enter international headlines, anonymous anarchists wrote **multiple statements** describing the situation from their perspective using the pen name **Archipelago of Fire**. We wanted to include their voices here as well.

## **August 25, 2025**

“Jakarta no longer belongs to the rotten elites. Thousands from every corner of the land stormed the capital. This is not just a protest, it's a collective eruption of rage against rising housing taxes, endless corruption, and the military-police dogs of the state.

“From dawn till midnight, the streets turn into a battlefield of defiance. Screams, fire, and stones become the people's language of fury.

“This is not some puppet show of the elites; this is raw anger, untamed, leaderless, and impossible to control.”

## **August 29, 2025**

“Angry youth are rising up, triggered by rising taxes and a repressive military. There's no organization; the insurrection is being spearheaded by young anarchists, nihilists, and uncontrollables. Many young anarchists from high school student associations are being arrested. The high schoolers are the energy. Around 400 of them were arrested on August 25, according to reports. Most of the actions are coordinated live on social media.

“Usually, some liberal union or opposition party controls the narratives, but not this time. Even mainstream media acknowledge that social media is the source of the documentation. Politicians cannot control the narratives any longer. It’s been a tradition for decades that executive student bodies normally are stewards for these kinds of demos, but each year, these brokers are getting outed. By the students themselves. That’s why NGOs, unions, ‘civil anarchists,’ and student associations of the left and right hate the anti-organizational faction.

“Fuck them all. We provoke the youngsters to act for themselves.

“Individuals are no longer spooked by ideological duty, norms, and all those external values.

“Last night (August 28, 2025), police murdered someone. Nationwide riots ensued against the tax rise. In several cities, the riot was organic and self-organized. The police’s public image continues to crumble, as the people support the rioters. Cells coordinated other things, and most nihilist-insurrectionary announcements are dominating the narrative.

“Anonymous social media accounts with thousands of followers are calling for anti-political insurgency. Every day, they make good calls and explanations.

“The union brokers announced they would be on the streets and ‘there will be no riot,’ but the youngsters and rioters mock them right away on social media. We give it up to the youngsters. We can only stimulate them to be more uncontrollable. At night, the internet went to shit. While “civil anarchists” call for people’s councils, we call for fuck everything. Only providing networking coordination and street action technical facts. We never really organize people.

“As of Friday, August 29, anarchists basically control the narrative. People are responding nationwide to a call to attack police stations and the police themselves. The mass media lost control of the information and news.

“Our network keeps calling for revenge since the police murder last night, and it’s getting hotter. The cells are in the streets.

“You can see the uprising on various news outlets, though all the good videos are only on social media.”

—Archipelago of Fire

*“This is beyond our prediction. Usually, during a demonstration, protesters only threw rocks or burned a tire in front of the office. They never stormed into the building or burned it.”*

—Anonymous anarchists in Indonesia

## Support Links

- **Indonesian Safe House Network**

## Further Reading

- **Indonesia Uprising: “A Collective Eruption of Rage”** [September 1, 2025]
- **Anarchists on the Wave of Protest in Indonesia** [2024]
- **A Brief History of Anarchism in Indonesia** [2022]
- **Under the Radar? The Changing Face of Repression Against Anarchism and Punk in Indonesia** [2021]
- **Anarchism in Indonesia** [2017]
- **Call to Arms: Insurrectionary Solidarity with Indonesia**
- **Serikat Tahanan**—A prisoners’ union collective, run by anarchist inmates
- **Anti-Feminist Feminist Collective** (Anarcha-Feminist Group)

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