

## Intimidation Against Press Freedom in Indonesia During Demonstrations Against the TNI Law

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### Abstract

Freedom of the press stands as one of the fundamental pillars of democracy and human rights, serving as an essential mechanism for public oversight, transparency, and the dissemination of information. Although constitutionally guaranteed by the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia and reinforced through Law No. 40 of 1999 concerning the Press, the practice of press freedom in Indonesia continues to face substantial challenges, including intimidation, violence, and criminalization of journalists. This study aims to identify the various forms of intimidation and violence faced by journalists, analyze their implications for freedom of expression and human rights, and propose recommendations for strengthening legal protection mechanisms for the press in Indonesia. Employing a normative legal research method with statutory, conceptual, analytical, and case approaches, the study examines the relationship between legal norms and their practical implementation. Case studies, such as the assaults on journalists Wildan Pratama and Rama Indra during coverage of the protests against the revision of the Indonesian National Armed Forces Law (UU TNI), reveal the inadequacy of legal protection and the persistence of human rights violations in the journalistic field. The findings demonstrate that violence against journalists not only infringes upon individual rights but also undermines democratic governance and social justice. Therefore, this research emphasizes the necessity of reinforcing legal frameworks, implementing national journalist safety protocols, enhancing legal literacy among law enforcement, and fostering collaboration between the government, the Press Council, and civil society to create a secure, independent, and ethical media environment in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Press freedom; human rights; journalist intimidation; democracy; legal protection.

### INTRODUCTION

Freedom of the press is recognized as a cornerstone of democracy and human rights. It serves as an essential mechanism for oversight, transparency, and the dissemination of information in society. The significance of press freedom is deeply embedded in various legal frameworks, including constitutional law, international jurisprudence, and ethical considerations surrounding human rights (Andiani & Riwanto, 2024; (Kalaloi et al., 2023; (Bakri et al., 2021; . In the context of Indonesia, the 1945 Constitution explicitly enshrines freedom of expression as a fundamental right, underscoring a national commitment to uphold democratic values (Kalaloi et al., 2023; (Bakri et al., 2021; . Despite these provisions, the realities of press freedom in Indonesia reveal an alarming paradox: while journalists are legally protected, they frequently face threats and restrictions that severely hamper their ability to operate effectively and independently Simandjuntak et al., 2024; (Makur et al., 2023).

The normative and axiological dimensions of press freedom underscore its importance not only as a legal right but also as a societal value that promotes democracy and justice (Sarif & Winatha, 2023; Sahdan & Gregorius, 2024). Legal protections, such as those enacted through Law No. 40 of 1999 concerning the Press, are designed to safeguard journalistic activities (Makur et al., 2023). However, the practical implementation of these laws is often undermined by governmental actions and societal pressures, leading to a climate of fear among journalists Simandjuntak et al., 2024; Devi, 2023; Sabubun & Hammar, 2024). The media's role as a watchdog

holds immense significance in promoting accountability and transparency within governance structures, especially in contexts where state actions may infringe upon individual rights (Bakri et al., 2021; Prasasti et al., 2024; Syatar et al., 2024).

The complexity surrounding press freedom in Indonesia is markedly evident during instances of political upheaval, particularly with issues related to state security (Sabubun & Hammar, 2024; Frahma, 2024). For example, incidents involving protests against government policies have often resulted in the harassment and intimidation of journalists attempting to report facts candidly (Utomo, 2023; Ahmad, 2021; Erdianti & Al-Fatih, 2020). Recent evidence, such as the violent suppression of journalists covering the demonstrations related to the revision of the Indonesian National Armed Forces Law (UU TNI), exemplifies the ongoing struggles faced by the press (Krisdinanto, 2024; Simandjuntak et al., 2024; Muthmainnah et al., 2022). When journalists are victims of violence and coercion, the repercussions extend beyond individual safety, fundamentally challenging the democratic fabric of society (Yudanto et al., 2024; Rumalean & Saleh, 2021).

Thus, the objectives of this study are threefold: to delineate the forms of intimidation and violence faced by journalists during the UU TNI protests, to explore the impact of such actions on broader systems of freedom of expression and human rights, and to propose practical recommendations for enhancing legal protections available to journalists in Indonesia (Sarbini, 2024; Dewi et al., 2023; Sasea & Sakmaf, 2023).

The analysis presented in this study aims to contribute not only to the academic discourse surrounding legal protections for press freedom but also to inform policymakers and civil society regarding the necessary reforms for safeguarding journalistic integrity and security (Hafizi & Rahman, 2024; Олешко & Mukhina, 2022). By examining the intertwined relationships of law, journalistic practice, and societal dynamics, this research endeavors to provide a comprehensive overview of the existing challenges and opportunities for enhancing press freedom in Indonesia as part of the global human rights framework (Natama et al., 2023; Triyanto, 2020).

Additionally, this study engages with the broader implications of press freedom on societal stability and democratic governance. The essential role of media as an instrument for public engagement and accountability cannot be overstated, particularly in democratic societies where informed citizenry is paramount (Jaman et al., 2024; Ermoshina, 2023; Salam, 2023; . Legal frameworks that fail to adequately protect journalists not only jeopardize the safety of these professionals but also undermine public access to information, thereby stifling constructive dialogue and civic participation (Saniah et al., 2024; Salam, 2023; Malau, 2020).

As such, examining the legal landscape surrounding press freedom in Indonesia provides critical insights into the protective measures that can be instituted to foster a healthier media environment. This research is pivotal in highlighting the enduring struggles faced by journalists, proposing necessary reforms, and ultimately advocating for a more conducive environment for the practice of journalism in Indonesia that respects and promotes human rights (Angellina, 2023; Mundzir et al., 2023; Gunawan et al., 2023).

## METHOD

The research method employed in this study is normative legal research, which encompasses various approaches, including the statutory approach, conceptual approach, analytical approach, and case approach. Normative legal research critically investigates legal norms and principles, facilitating a comprehensive analysis of relevant legislation, doctrines, and case law, which is essential for understanding complex legal frameworks. This method allows for the examination of primary legal materials like statutes, secondary legal materials, including legal expert opinions, and tertiary materials such as legal commentaries or dictionaries Putra et al., 2024; Jiwantara, 2024; Saepudin et al., 2024). By utilizing these resources, the research aims to build a solid foundation for examining the interplay between legal obligations and their ethical implications, particularly in contexts involving human rights and justice (Tantoi et al., 2023; Patawari & Mamonto, 2023).

The statutory approach helps delineate the specific legal obligations and standards that govern pertinent issues, while the conceptual approach explores the underlying ethical dimensions of these statutes (R & Budiarsih, 2023; Udjari et al., 2020; Jamaluddin et al., 2021). This integration of statutory and conceptual frameworks ensures that legal protections extend beyond mere compliance, fostering a broader understanding of how these laws affect societal values and human rights in practice (Thamrin, 2023). Furthermore, the analytical approach assists in dissecting complex case law, thereby illustrating the application and interpretation of legal principles in real-world scenarios. Collectively, this multifaceted research design not only enriches scholarly discourse surrounding legal protections but also significantly contributes to practical recommendations for policymaking and legal reforms (Rauzi & Hadi, 2024; Chandra, 2023).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Forms of Intimidation and Violence against Journalists: Case Studies

On March 24, 2025, a demonstration opposing the revision of the Indonesian National Armed Forces Law (UU TNI) took place in front of Grahadi State Building, Surabaya. What began as a peaceful protest soon turned into a grim illustration of press freedom issues in Indonesia, as two journalists—Wildan Pratama of Suara Surabaya and Rama Indra of Beritajatim.com—fell victim to violence and intimidation by security personnel while covering the event. Wildan was reportedly coerced by police officers into deleting all visual documentation, including files stored in the trash folder on his device. The deleted images depicted demonstrators being detained and were erased under the pretext of being "under investigation." This act can be considered an obstruction of independent journalistic work, threatening journalistic integrity and interfering with the journalists' rights to disseminate information freely and objectively (Andiani & Riwanto, 2024). Such practices undermine the freedoms guaranteed by law and signal a disturbing trend where the safety of journalists is compromised, reflecting a systemic issue in the protection of press freedom in Indonesia (Andiani & Riwanto, 2024)(AlAshry, 2023; .

The situation became more dire for Rama Indra, who reportedly endured physical violence while documenting the actions of security forces against demonstrators. Despite displaying his official press card, he was subjected to beatings and intimidation; he was physically restrained and forced to delete his video recordings. Such repression of the press jeopardizes the fundamental principles of democracy designed to protect public information disseminators (AlAshry, 2023; .

Violence against journalists did not cease there; the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) reported incidents including forced searches of journalists, violating legal protocols and infringing upon privacy rights. Reports of such misconduct proliferated from major cities during protest waves, with journalists from various media outlets facing violence, equipment confiscation, and verbal threats (AlAshry, 2023; Díaz-Cerveró et al., 2022). One distressing incident involved a severed pig's head sent to Tempo's office, functioning as a form of intimidation against critical reporting. Collectively, these cases illustrate a systematic environment where intimidation—from physical violence to unlawful searches—serves to constrain public narratives and diminish press independence, affecting not only journalists' work but also the broader media landscape's resilience against systemic oppression (Andiani & Riwanto, 2024).

## **2. Implications for Freedom of Expression and Human Rights**

The acts of intimidation and violence against journalists covering demonstrations against the UU TNI revision have profound implications for freedom of expression and the protection of human rights in Indonesia. These incidents escalate beyond mere attacks on individual journalists; they signify systemic violations of the public's right to access truthful and transparent information, which is a cornerstone of democratic governance (Simandjuntak et al., 2024; (Andiani & Riwanto, 2024; Sumarwan et al., 2023). The right to information is entrenched in national legal instruments such as the 1945 Constitution and in international agreements, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Indonesia has ratified. Such legal frameworks affirm the critical nature of press freedom as a fundamental human right, emphasizing that any hindrance to this right represents a broader infringement on societal liberties (Andiani & Riwanto, 2024; Sumarwan et al., 2023). When state actors intimidate, suppress, or resort to violence against journalists performing their duties, they effectively obstruct the vital informational flow to the public, thereby compromising democratic accountability and transparency (Simandjuntak et al., 2024; Mubarak, 2021).

The cases of Wildan Pratama, Rama Indra, and their colleagues reflect a disturbing pattern where physical violence, coercive deletion of documentation, and verbal threats contribute to a climate of fear and deterrence in the media landscape (Simandjuntak et al., 2024; Toha & Cosslett, 2023). Such actions not only jeopardize the immediate safety of journalists but erode their long-term capability to report on sensitive issues, thus weakening their role as social watchdogs (Azhari et al., 2023; Khadafi et al., 2022). This domino effect has substantial ramifications on public discourse; when media outlets are unable to report freely and accurately, societal access to diverse and objective perspectives on crucial matters—such as governmental policies and law enforcement practices—diminishes (Andiani & Riwanto, 2024; Khadafi et al., 2022). Consequently, structural silencing takes place, which restricts public criticism and diminishes civic engagement in democratic processes. These insights echo the findings of researchers like (Andiani & Riwanto, 2024; , who contend that repressive actions against the media not only breach democratic tenets but also foster patterns of information suppression detrimental to the broader public interest (Andiani & Riwanto, 2024; Syam, 2022). It is imperative for the Indonesian state to adopt a proactive stance in protecting freedom of expression and ensuring journalists can operate without fear, which will serve to uphold the democratic ethos and enhance civic participation (Azhari et al., 2023; Ariwianto, 2024).



### 3. Recommendations for the Protection of the Press and Journalists

Ensuring the protection of journalists is a fundamental requirement for upholding democracy and freedom of expression in Indonesia. As the fourth pillar of democracy, the press plays a critical role in informing the public, overseeing government accountability, and facilitating communication between society and the state (Simandjuntak et al. (2024)Toha & Cosslett, 2023). However, journalists frequently encounter various threats, including intimidation, physical violence, criminalization, and political or economic pressures aimed at silencing critical voices (Cohen, 2020; Hamada & Abdel-Salam, 2024). This challenging environment necessitates strong legal protections and institutional support, which are essential for empowering journalists to work independently, safely, and professionally. Moreover, the fundamental nature of press freedom as a human right mandates that the Indonesian government actively prioritizes the protection of journalists to foster a vibrant democratic society (Sumarwan et al., 2023; Khoirunnisa & Effendi, 2023).

The principal legal foundation for safeguarding press freedom in Indonesia is Law No. 40 of 1999 concerning the Press, which explicitly recognizes press freedom as a human right and obligates the state to guarantee such freedom (Zirugo, 2024; Pinckney & Chin, 2021). Article 8 of this law is particularly important as it provides legal protection for journalists in carrying out their professional duties (Balderacchi et al., 2024). Yet, in practice, effective implementation often falls short, with many journalists continuing to experience violence while executing their responsibilities, especially in contexts such as agrarian conflicts, student demonstrations, or corruption investigations (Hardi et al., 2023). To address these challenges, an important protective mechanism is the media safety protocol, developed collaboratively by the Press Council, journalist associations like AJI, and legal aid organizations such as LBH Pers. This protocol aims to provide prompt response measures when journalists become victims of violence, including legal assistance, psychological support, and dissemination of journalists' rights in the field (Abhipraya et al., 2020). Research indicates that regional journalists are particularly vulnerable to violence due to insufficient law enforcement understanding and limited access to legal aid resources (Iannone, 2022). Thus, it becomes imperative to strengthen legal literacy among both journalists and law enforcement officials while implementing standardized national safety training as a strategic priority (GUMILAR, 2023).

Journalistic protection is further strengthened through adherence to professional ethics, as journalists who uphold the Journalistic Code of Ethics—by engaging in verification, ensuring balance, and avoiding false reporting—are more likely to gain institutional support from the Press Council (Rahayu et al., 2024). This understanding of protection transcends mere legal constructs to encompass socio-moral dimensions, wherein societal support for credible journalism aligns with the pursuit of truth and public interest (Kristianita & Najicha, 2022). Therefore, safeguarding journalists necessitates a collaborative effort that combines state regulations, professional awareness, civil society participation, and institutional support from bodies like the Press Council and journalist associations (Tyson & Nawawi, 2022). The state must not only enact legal protections but also ensure practical measures that are effective in safeguarding journalists' safety and independence from threats (Abiduloh & Hasan, 2021). Concurrently, journalists must maintain professional integrity, fulfilling their social responsibility to provide accurate, honest, and accountable information (Wahyudi & Sujoko, 2024).

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that press freedom in Indonesia remains fragile due to the persistent occurrence of intimidation and violence against journalists, particularly during coverage of politically sensitive or security-related events. Incidents such as the assaults on journalists during the protests against the revision of the Indonesian National Armed Forces Law (UU TNI) highlight the weakness of law enforcement and the insufficient implementation of constitutional guarantees protecting journalists. Such violations not only endanger the safety of individual reporters but also erode democratic principles by restricting the public's right to access accurate and independent information. Strengthening press freedom requires the state's active commitment to enforcing Law No. 40 of 1999 concerning the Press, ensuring legal accountability for perpetrators of violence against journalists, and enhancing the institutional capacity of protection mechanisms. Furthermore, effective collaboration among the Press Council, professional journalist associations, legal aid institutions, and civil society organizations is essential to establish a sustainable and rights-based protection system. Only through such collective efforts can Indonesia foster an enabling environment where journalism thrives as a vital instrument of democracy, transparency, and human rights protection.

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