

Optimism in an Age of Political Pessimism

News:

A tense incident unfolded at Gadjah Mada University (UGM)—one of Indonesia's most prestigious universities—on Monday, June 15, 2026, when a group of students stormed and forcibly dissolved a public discussion forum. The event was attended by several high-ranking officials of the *Kabinet Merah Putih* (Red and White Cabinet), including Budiman Sudjatmiko (Head of the Poverty Alleviation Acceleration Agency), Nusron Wahid (Minister of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/Head of the National Land Agency), and Sudaryono (Vice Minister of Agriculture).

This incident did not occur in a vacuum. It marks a direct continuation and escalation of a wave of student protests themed "*Menuju Indonesia Bangkrut*" (Toward a Bankrupt Indonesia). The movement has been fuelled by accumulating student grievances over a string of government economic policies, culminating in mass mobilizations since June 12, 2026.

Comment:

This flashpoint is hardly surprising. The erosion of public trust among the youth toward the government and the political system in Indonesia was already evident in the early 2025 survey by the ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute. Titled "*Youth and Civic Engagement in Southeast Asia: A Survey of Undergraduates in Six Countries*," the study revealed that a staggering majority of Indonesian respondents—53.9 percent—harbor a pessimistic outlook, viewing the country's political situation as deeply flawed.

While Indonesia tops the list in political pessimism, it does not stand alone in the ASEAN region. It is closely followed by Thai youths, with 47.3 percent viewing their nation's politics negatively, and the Philippines at 41.9 percent.

This widespread pessimism stems from the fact that the masses are living in a dystopian era—characterized by a suffocating existence (*ma'isyatan dhonka*) rife with suffering, injustice, and chaos due to the systemic dysfunction of political leadership. The rise of the *ruwaibidloh* (incompetent and deceitful) regimes across Muslim nations, including Indonesia, has exacerbated the situation, effectively crushing the morale of the younger generation and dampening their optimism for the future.

Furthermore, pessimism is an inevitable byproduct of a secular life that sidelines the Islamic *Aqidah* (creed). Resembling layers of darkness that form an endless labyrinth, the *Ummah* (community) desperately needs the guidance of Islam to navigate toward their true future—both in this world and the Hereafter. As Allah Subhaanahu Wa Ta'ala says: ﴿وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَلَا الْمُسِيءُ ۗ﴾

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Therefore, offering an Islamic vision for change is critical before youth movements succumb to frustration and anarchy. The Islamic vision provides an ideal for change rooted in faith and *bashirah*—the profound discernment to distinguish truth (*haqq*) from falsehood (*bathil*). It allows the youth to envision the true profile of political leadership in Islam: how power can be wielded with justice and strength without the abuse of power, and how the wealth of the community can be managed and distributed equitably, free from *usury* economics and oligarchic gambling.

This *bashirah* is born from deep insight into how the Islamic system offers comprehensive solutions. When contrasted with the secular capitalist system, the conceptual superiority of Islam becomes clear, allowing the *Ummah* to recognize the stark differences through the lens of human fitrah (innate nature). Cultivating this *bashirah* can begin by introducing Islamic concepts into public discourse through methods that ignite the imagination of the youth, serving as the catalyst for genuine change within the community.

Naturally, this vision of change can only be conveyed methodically through Islamic *da'wah* (proselytization), which aims to restore Islamic governance under the shade of a global institution, the Islamic Khilafah, equipped with complete ideological infrastructure and political-economic frameworks.

Consequently, educating the young Muslim generation through creative approaches that resonate with their reality is paramount. This ensures their minds are not hijacked by apolitical religious escapism nor anarchic movements born purely out of frustration.

An Islamic vision nurtures a resilient generation of Muslim youth who remain steadfast amid uncertainty. Guided by the light of faith, they find clarity in the path before them and anchor themselves to the One Who is the ultimate source of certainty. Empowered by this conviction, they cultivate creative courage, unwavering optimism, critical discernment, and active engagement in the great concerns of the Ummah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Such a generation approaches the future not with fear or despair, but with confidence, purpose, and hope, as Allah Ta'ala declares: ﴿الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ، وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ، وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ﴾ **“Who believe in the unseen, establish prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them.”** [QS. al-Baqarah: 3]

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