

# State and University Collusion: The Repression of Academic Freedom in Indonesia

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## Abstract

This article discusses the decline of academic freedom in Indonesian universities, which has become increasingly evident in recent years. Although academic freedom is a key pillar of higher education, in practice it is often undermined by state interference, authoritarian tendencies among university leaders, and a weak legal framework for protecting the academic rights of lecturers and students. This study seeks to answer two main questions: how the state, university administration, and legal regulations interact to suppress academic freedom, and what forms of repression occur, along with the reforms needed to strengthen academic autonomy. The data for this study were obtained through document and content analysis of academic publications, higher education regulations, media reports, and official documents related to cases of repression. The findings show that repression takes three primary forms: (1) the criminalisation of lecturers who criticise campus policies; (2) censorship and silencing of student press institutions; and (3) the prohibition and dissolution of public discussions that raise sensitive issues or criticise the government. These forms of repression are reinforced by a neo-feudal culture within campus bureaucracy and by insufficient legal protections, particularly for students. The study highlights the urgent need for reforms in higher education regulations and the strengthening of institutional autonomy to ensure that academic freedom is protected as a fundamental right for all members of the academic community.

Keywords: *academic freedom; freedom of expression; Indonesia higher education*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Academic freedom is the core of a university's existence, and many argue that a robust higher education system could not exist without it. It is defined as the freedom of individuals to express their opinions freely about the institutions or systems in which they work, to perform their functions without discrimination or fear of state

pressure or other actors, to participate in professional or renowned academic institutions, and to enjoy internationally recognized human rights that are equally applicable to others within the same jurisdiction. In other words, academic freedom is a fundamental principle of higher education that ensures the independence of teaching and research, protects scholars from external interference, and upholds the pursuit of truth through institutional autonomy.<sup>1</sup> Universities are regarded as institutions devoted to the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge, and should therefore be afforded special autonomy in seeking truth.<sup>2</sup>

However, despite the ideal concept of academic freedom as the foundation of higher education, its realisation in practice often faces significant challenges. This discrepancy becomes evident in the context of Indonesia, where the autonomy of academic institutions is frequently undermined by internal and external pressures, including local university administrators, as well as the state.<sup>3</sup> Repression in universities does not only target lecturers but also students, particularly those who are not granted protection under existing laws.<sup>4</sup> While lecturers are often repressed for criticizing university leadership, students experience repression through their involvement in campus activities, such as participation in student press agencies and the organization of public discussions. In several instances, public discussions that criticized government policies were dissolved by university authorities, either through unilateral decisions or following pressure from state apparatus.<sup>5</sup> These practices indicate a broader pattern of declining academic freedom in Indonesia.

Research on the repression of academic freedom in Indonesian universities has generally focused on three broad themes: how academic freedom is defined in

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1 Philip G Altbach, "Academic Freedom: International Realities and Challenges" in *Tradit Transit* (BRILL, 2007) 49.

2 Randy J Kozel, "Institutional autonomy and constitutional structure" (2013) 112 Mich L Rev 957.

3 The Conversation, "Data Bicara: setidaknya 64 dosen, mahasiswa, dan individu lain jadi korban pelanggaran kebebasan akademik selama 2019-2022", (2022), online: *Conversat* <<https://theconversation.com/data-bicara-setidaknya-64-dosen-mahasiswa-dan-individu-lain-jadi-korban-pelanggaran-kebebasan-akademik-selama-2019-2022-193722>>.

4 Ady Thea DA, "Akademisi Beberkan 6 Sebab Kebebasan Akademik Terus Mengalami Tekanan", (2022), online: *Huk Online* <<https://www.hukumonline.com/berita/a/akademisi-beberkan-6-sebab-kebebasan-akademik-terus-mengalami-tekanan-lt63a2eb79e3148/>>. Mutia Yuantsya, "Represi Komunitas Perguruan Tinggi Indonesia Dianggap Ancam Kemajuan Masa Depan", (2022), online: *Tempo.co* <<https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1592807/represi-komunitas-perguruan-tinggi-indonesia-dianggap-ancam-kemajuan-masa-depan>>.

5 Adi Briantika, "Mempertanyakan Pembubaran Diskusi & Mimbar Bebas di Area Kampus", (2022), online: *Tirto.id*.

principle,<sup>6</sup> how it is challenged in everyday academic life,<sup>7</sup> and how power relations between the state and university leaders shape what can or cannot be expressed on campus.<sup>8</sup> These perspectives reveal that academic freedom is often constrained, not only conceptually, but also through institutional practices and political pressures that influence campus governance.<sup>9</sup> However, discussions rarely explore how these different forces interact or how they jointly restrict the ability of lecturers and students to speak, teach, and engage critically. This article therefore asks two key questions: (1) how do state influence, university administration, and legal frameworks intersect to suppress academic freedom in Indonesian higher education institutions; and (2) what reforms are necessary to strengthen academic autonomy and protect freedom of expression?

Academic freedom and freedom of expression in higher education demand critical attention for two reasons. Firstly, academic freedom provides space for lecturers and students to conduct research, engage in discussion, and express their views without fear of repressive action. This supports the creation of objective and innovative knowledge, which is essential in the academic world. Secondly, freedom of expression allows students and lecturers to freely express their opinions and criticize existing policies or ideologies. This creates an environment that supports the

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6 Jogchum Vrielink, Paul Lemmens & Stephan Parmentier, “Academic Freedom as a Fundamental Right” (2011) 13 *Procedia - Soc Behav Sci* 117-120, online: <<https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S1877042811001790>>; Antoon De Baets, “Academic Freedom Between History and Human Rights in a Global Context” in *Third Int Handb Glob Educ Policy Res* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021) 923; Mada Sutapa, “Sebuah Refleksi Kebebasan Akademik Dalam Masyarakatilmiah Perguruan Tinggi” (2010) 02 *J Manaj Pendidik UNY*; Musaddad Harahap, “Refleksi Dinamika Kebebasan Akademis dalam Pendidikan Islam” (2017) 1:1 *J Pendidik Agama Islam Al-Thariqah* 87, online: <<https://journal.uir.ac.id/index.php/althariqah/article/view/621>>; Imam Moedjiono, “Cendikiawan dan Kebebasan Akademik” (1999) V:IV *JPIFAIJurusan Tarb*.

7 Sigit Riyanto, “Quo Vadis Kebebasan Akademik Dan Tanggung Jawab Intelektual,” in *Sidang Senat Penerimaan Mahasiswa Baru Tahun Akademik 2021/2022 Dan Wisuda Sarjana Tahun Akademik 2020/2021 Sekolah Tinggi Hukum Indonesia Jentera* (Jakarta, 2021) 28; Herlambang P. Wiratraman, “Kebebasan Akademik, Neo-Feodalisme Dan Penindasan HAM,” in *HAM: Politik, Hukum Dan Agama Di Indonesia* (Jember: The Centre for Human Rights Multiculturalism and Migration, 2020), <https://herlambangperdana.files.wordpress.com/2018/12/wiratraman-hp-2018-kebebasan-akademik-neo-feodalisme-dan-penindasan-ham-dalam-al-khanif-dan-manunggal-eds-hak-asasi-manusia-politik-hukum-dan-agama-di-indonesia-yogyakarta-lki.pdf>; Herlambang P. Wiratraman, “Persma, Antara Kebebasan Pers dan Akademik” *Maj Pers Mhs POROS* (2019).

8 Herlambang Perdana Wiratraman, “Marginalised Academics under Joko Widodo’s Authoritarian Politics,” in *Marginalisation and Human Rights in Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2022), 190, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003331858-14>; Terence Karran, “Academic Freedom in Europe: A Preliminary Comparative Analysis,” *Higher Education Policy* 20, no. 3 (September 1, 2007): 289-291, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.hep.8300159>; Altbach, *supra* note 1.

9 Daniel Gordon, “The Firing of Angela Davis at UCLA, 1969-1970: Communism, Academic Freedom, and Freedom of Speech,” *Society* 57, no. 6 (2020) 601; Klaus D. Beiter, Terrence Karran, and Kwadwo Appiagyei-Atua, “‘Measuring’ the Erosion of Academic Freedom as an International Human Right: A Report on the Legal Protection of Academic Freedom in Europe,” *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* 49, no. 3 (2016) 597; Andrew Rosser, “Neo-liberalism and the politics of higher education policy in Indonesia” (2016) 52:2 *Comp Educ* 109-112, online: <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03050068.2015.1112566>>.

development of critical and analytical thinking, which are important skills for personal and professional development. Furthermore, academic freedom plays a role in strengthening democratic values, as universities become places where various ideas can be freely exchanged. This also provides an opportunity to criticize government policies or unfair systems, which is important for promoting positive social change.

The research employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the dynamics of academic freedom repression in Indonesian higher education institutions. This method allows for an in-depth understanding of the socio-political context and institutional mechanisms that shape academic autonomy. Data collection was conducted through document and content analysis of various secondary sources, including academic publications, policy documents, news reports, and official statements related to cases of repression against lecturers and students. These materials were examined to identify patterns of control, forms of repression, and the actors involved, particularly the interplay between state authorities and university administrators. The study also included a comparative review of existing legal frameworks governing higher education to assess their adequacy in safeguarding academic freedom and freedom of expression. Data were then analysed using a thematic approach to uncover recurring themes and power relations influencing academic life, such as institutional dependency, bureaucratic hierarchy, and political intervention. Through these methods, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive picture of the state of academic freedom within Indonesian universities.

## II. ACADEMIC REPRESSION

Academic repression, according to Best, is a denial of the right of academics in university settings to conduct research, publish, teach, speak, and live a political life of their choice.<sup>10</sup> In cases of repression, academics were disturbed, punished, and even fired for adopting critical, controversial, or dissenting views on various topics. According to Nocella et. al., academic repression is used as a strategy to target, control, and deviate a person or group from ideas, actions, and identities by an authority or academic system.<sup>11</sup>

Academic repression is not only carried out by university leadership, but also by students and alumni.<sup>12</sup> Faculty members have been targeted for supporting, sympathizing, or merely being a scholar of dissent to policies of various kinds. In the contemporary case of the United States, the general targets of academic repression are minority groups, persons with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and the economically disadvantaged.<sup>13</sup> These practices reveal how universities often

10 Steven Best, "Introduction: The Rise of the Academic-Industrial Complex and the Crisis in Free Speech" in *Acad Repress Reflections from Acad Complex* (2010) 23-27.

11 Erik Juergensmeyer, Anthony J Nocella II & Mark Seis, "The Academic Industrial Complex: The Dangers of Corporate Education and Factory Schooling" in *Neoliberalism Acad Repress* (Brill, 2019) 4-7.

12 Gerry Leisman, "Editorial - Academic Repression in the Cause of Peace?" (2015) 5:4 *Funct Neurol Rehabil Erg* 435-439.

13 Erik Juergensmeyer, Anthony J. Nocella II & Mark Seis, *supra* note 11.

reproduce existing social hierarchies and discriminatory structures, rather than serving as neutral spaces for intellectual exchange. Consequently, academic repression has become a mechanism for maintaining institutional control and silencing alternative perspectives that challenge the status quo.

According to Best, the primary source of repression is not the university itself, but a contemporary capitalist society that strongly shapes certain structures, functions, and priorities.<sup>14</sup> In the Indonesian context, this explains how the suppression of academic freedom by university administrators reflects broader power structures rather than merely individual acts of censorship. The repression of lecturers and students illustrates what Fotopoulos refers to as the heteronomous nature of society, in which education serves the interests of political and bureaucratic elites rather than fostering critical autonomy. Modern universities often internalise the values of the state and the market, as is the case in Indonesia, where academic institutions function as extensions of state authority rather than as autonomous centres of knowledge. Neoliberal and political forces co-opt education, reflecting how universities in Indonesia suppress dissent to align themselves with the agendas of the state or other institutional powers.

In Indonesia, the practice of repressing academic freedom can be found in a number of cases involving students and lecturers. Lecturers experience repression for criticising the policies of university leaders and government policies related to development issues. Meanwhile, students experience repression through silencing of critical press outlets that report on the policies of university leaders. Public discussions that attempted to criticise government policies are often dispersed by university leaders at the urging of state officials. The most recent case occurred in November 2024, when the Rector of Ar-Raniry State Islamic University banned a screening of a film entitled *Oligarki* that was to be held by the Constitutional Law Student Association on campus.<sup>15</sup> The film portrays how oligarchs dominated politics, the economy, and natural resources in Indonesia to secure the victory of President Prabowo Subianto and Vice President Gibran Rakabuming Raka in the 2024 elections. The rector argued that it was inappropriate to associate Prabowo with oligarchy because his commitments did not point in that direction.

Another case of repression of academic freedom was experienced by Bambang Heru Suharjo, a professor at IPB University, who was reported to the police in early 2025 for testifying as an expert witness in a tin corruption case. The report against Heru was filed by Andi Kusuma, the chairman of the local community organisation Putra Putri Tempatan (Perpatan). However, Heru's testimony as an expert witness was requested by the Attorney General's Office in the investigation process to analyse the total environmental damage in the case. A similar case involved Saiful Mahdi of Syiah Kuala University, who criticised the dean's policy for the selection of civil

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14 Best, *supra* note 10.

15 Sumberpost, "Pelarangan NOBAR Oligarki, Rektor: Prabowo Tidak Seperti Itu", (2024), online: *Sumberpost.com* <<https://sumberpost.com/2024/11/05/pelarangan-nobar-oligarki-rektor-prabowo-tidak-seperti-itu/>>.

servant candidates. Mahdi was sentenced to three months in prison, although he was later granted amnesty by President Jokowi.

The above cases demonstrate the fragility of academic freedom in Indonesia, where universities, which should be safe places for critical thinking and expression of views, are instead vulnerable to the influence of political and bureaucratic power. The pattern of repression against lecturers and students shows that criticism of government policies and university leadership is treated as a threat rather than an intellectual contribution. The dissolution of discussions, legal reports against academics, and the criminalisation of internal campus criticism show how political pressure, institutional fear, and legal mechanisms are used to silence critical voices.

### III. ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The rules of academic freedom vary in each university. Some universities protect the academic freedom of lecturers only in the cases of teaching and research, but relatively disregard the university's institutional freedom, both its internal management and the autonomy of the institution.<sup>16</sup> However, a number of parameters produced by the International Association of Universities for UNESCO exist at the international level, including Recommendations Concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel.<sup>17</sup> The recommendation defines four pillars of academic freedom in universities: (1) institutional autonomy; (2) institutional accountability; (3) individual rights and freedoms (civil freedom, academic liberty, right to publication, and international exchange of information), and (4) self-governance and collegiality.

Kerlind & Kayrooz established five qualifications for academic freedom based on the role and type of obstacle.<sup>18</sup> First, freedom from obstacles to academic activities, which means that academics can teach, research, and express ideas without any intervention. Second, freedom from internal institutional regulatory obstacles, where bureaucratic systems, campus regulations, and internal academic governance do not block academic activities. Third, freedom from external regulatory barriers, such as government regulations, political pressure, and external forces, which can limit research or academic expression. Fourth, freedom from a combination of active institutional support, where the institution does not hinder and also actively provides structures, resources, environments, and support that grant academics freedom to work. Fifth, freedom accompanied by responsibility, namely that academics have a moral responsibility to voice their critical analyses and be accountable to the scientific community and the wider society. In other words, academic freedom is a dynamic

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16 Karan, *supra* note 8.

17 UNESCO, "Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel", (1997), online: *UNESCO* <<https://en.unesco.org/about-us/legal-affairs/recommendation-concerning-status-higher-education-teaching-personnel>>.

18 Gerlese S A°kerlind & Carole Kayrooz, "Understanding Academic Freedom: The views of social scientists" (2003) 22:3 High Educ Res Dev 327-330, online: <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0729436032000145176>>.

spectrum that not only provides freedom from any obstacles for academics, but also involves regulation, institutional support, and professional responsibility.

In Indonesia, apart from Articles 28, 28C, 28E, and 28F of the 1945 Constitution, special rules concerning academic freedom can be found in Law No. 12 on Higher Education. The law guarantees academic freedom through the framework of Tridharma, which outlines the basic functions of higher education institutions in Indonesia: education and teaching, research, and community service.<sup>19</sup> However, as noted by Wiratraman, the Higher Education Law still has a number of weaknesses, one of the most fundamental being that the regulation does not explicitly grant students academic freedom.<sup>20</sup> As a result, neither the Higher Education Law nor various internal campus regulations have been able to provide adequate protections.

In the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the description of academic freedom is contained in General Comment 13, which explains that the right to education can only be fulfilled if accompanied by academic freedom for faculty, staff, and students. Faculty are considered highly vulnerable to political and similar pressures that threaten academic freedom. Furthermore, it is stated that members of the academic community, both individually or collectively, are free to pursue, develop, and disseminate knowledge and ideas. This freedom entails certain responsibilities, such as the obligation to respect the academic freedom of others, to ensure balanced discussion between conflicting views, and to treat everyone without discrimination in areas where it is prohibited.

#### IV. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Freedom of expression has been recognized as a fundamental right, as reaffirmed in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to Wellington, freedom of expression deserves protection in order to preserve individual autonomy and participation in democratic life. Although freedom of expression poses potential for harm through defamation or libel, according to Scanlon, this freedom must be protected on the assumption that its benefits outweigh its potential harms.

In Indonesia, the state of freedom of expression has been closely linked to political developments. Since the 1945 Constitution recognised it through Article 28, its implementation in practice has depended on the configuration of power at present. The Old Order and New Order regimes restricted freedom of expression through repressive regulations, such as controlling the press as a means to silence criticism and maintain political stability.<sup>21</sup> During the Reform Era, freedom of expression saw a ray of hope with the enactment of the Press Law, new constitutional amendments, and the increased media freedom. However, the sustainability of this freedom has not been without its challenges, as the emergence of new regulations

19 Bukman Lian, *Tanggung jawab Tridharma perguruan tinggi menjawab kebutuhan masyarakat* (2019).

20 Wiratraman, *supra* note 7.

21 R Herlambang Perdana Wiratraman, *New Media and Human Rights: The Legal Battle of Freedom of Expression in Indonesia* (2010) 2-5.

such as Law No. 11/2008 on Electronic Information & Transactions (ITE Law) has seen restrictions on freedom of expression taking on a modern form.<sup>22</sup>

Overall, the state of freedom of expression in Indonesia has fluctuated, expanding during the Reform Era but remaining vulnerable to regulations that could potentially stifle criticism. This historical pattern has carried over directly into academic circles, as campuses are part of the public sphere and are also connected to the state and its apparatus. As a result, academic freedom has never stood as a truly autonomous right, but has always been influenced by political policies, the legal system, and a long history of bureaucratic restrictions on expression. Existing legal regulations, particularly the Higher Education Law, are not yet fully in line with the principle of freedom of expression because they do not provide adequate protection for students and leave space for institutional control.<sup>23</sup>

According to Cohen, limits to freedom of expression must also be considered when it conflicts with other important values, such as equality and the prevention of harm.<sup>24</sup> He argues that restrictions on freedom of expression can be justified, especially when speech promotes inequality and discrimination. However, this restriction must be carefully considered to avoid overly broad and unfair regulations. Weinrib clearly states freedom of expression is a critical part of a democratic system of government, in which representative members govern with the consent of the people.<sup>25</sup> Consent can only be given legitimately if the people have freedom to express their preferences on matters of public interest, criticize certain views, and offer alternatives solutions.

Academic freedom is important because it seeks to protect and provide special responsibilities that go beyond the general right to freedom of expression. In Dworkin's view, academic freedom is not only important for the individuals directly involved, but also for society at large, as restrictions on academic freedom undermine the foundations of liberal society by curtailing the freedoms necessary for personal and intellectual growth.<sup>26</sup> Dworkin proposed that academic freedom should be understood as a vital component of ethical individualism, or the idea that individuals are responsible for making their own decisions and pursuing truth in accordance with their personal beliefs. Dworkin urges those in academia to resist pressures that seek to compromise this freedom in the name of political correctness in order to pursue truth and build a free society that can refine its ideas.

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22 Nilman Ghofur, "Law, Media, and Democracy in the Digital Era: Freedom of Expression and ITE Regulation in Indonesia" (2024) 12:2 Al-Mazaahib J Perbandingan Huk 184-188. Zico Junius Fernando et al, "The freedom of expression in Indonesia" (2022) 8:1 Cogent Soc Sci 2103944 1-4.

23 Herlambang Perdana Wiratraman & Sébastien Lafrance, "Protecting Freedom of Expression in Multicultural Societies: Comparing Constitutionalism in Indonesia and Canada" (2021) 36:1 Yuridika 75.

24 Joshua Cohen, "Freedom of expression" (1993) 22:3 Philos Public Aff 207-210.

25 Jacob Weinrib, "What is the Purpose of Freedom of Expression" (2009) 67 Univ Toronto Fac Law Rev 165.

26 Ronald Dworkin, "We Need a New Interpretation of Academic Freedom" (1996) 82:3 Academe 10, online: <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/40251473?origin=crossref>>.

## V. THE CRIMINALIZATION OF CRITICISM

The most prominent form of repression of academic freedom is the criminalization of lecturers who criticize the leadership policies of the universities in which they work. Amnesty International Indonesia recorded sixty-four cases related to academic freedom in Indonesia between 2019 to 2022.<sup>27</sup> However, according to Herlambang, Amnesty International's data is only partially captured, as many cases are not publicized.<sup>28</sup> Other forms of repression including digital attacks and hacking, intimidation, threats, university sanctions, detention or arrest, violence, and harassment. The table below details a number of cases of the criminalization of lecturers.

Table 1: Cases of criminalization of lecturers criticizing campus policies

Lecturer's Name	Forms of Repression
Bintatar Sinaga (2023)	Suspected of criticism of the Dean of Pakuan Bogor University over the faculty's governance, leadership style, alleged conflicts of interest, and noncompliance with Indonesia's "Freedom to Learn - Independent Campus" (MBKM) initiative.
Saiful Mahdi (2019)	Imprisoned for criticizing Selection for Civil Servant Candidates (CPNS) recruitment practices within Universitas Syiah Kuala's Faculty of Engineering through a WhatsApp group.
Ramsiah (2017)	Reported to the police for criticizing Deputy Dean III FDK of Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin (UIN Makassar) for shutting down Syiar Radio broadcasts.
Ubedillah Badrun (2017)	Reported to the police for criticizing Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ) policy regarding a rector charged with corruption, as well as plagiarism of a doctoral student's dissertation.

The cases below illustrate a systematic pattern in which academic staff who express concerns about mismanagement, ethical violations, or governance failures are met with punitive responses that escalate into police reports or criminal process. The case of Bintatar Sinaga is an example of the criminalization of internal academic dissent. Bintatar, a senior lecturer at Pakuan University, was named a criminal suspect

27 Conversation, *supra* note 3.

28 Ahmad Arif, "Tekanan dan Ancaman terhadap Kebebasan Akademik Menguat", (2022), online: *Kompas* <<https://www.kompas.id/baca/ilmiah-populer/2022/02/04/tekanan-dan-ancaman-terhadap-kebebasan-akademik-menguat>>.

after publicly questioning the dean's governance practices. His criticisms concerned essential elements of academic administration: alleged mismanagement of the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program, potential conflicts of interest in leadership decisions, and what he viewed as an authoritarian leadership style. Instead of being addressed through academic deliberation or internal evaluation, these criticisms were treated as a criminal matter, illustrating how leadership structures may resort to legal coercion rather than institutional accountability.

The case of Saiful Mahdi is one of the most widely discussed examples of the criminalization of academic expression. Saiful, a mathematics lecturer at Universitas Syiah Kuala (Unsyiah), was imprisoned for writing a message in a faculty WhatsApp group criticizing irregularities in the civil service recruitment test (CPNS) at the Faculty of Engineering. His critique focused on statistical inconsistencies that suggested possible maladministration. University authorities responded by reporting him to the police under defamation charges, ultimately resulting in a three-month prison sentence before he was granted presidential amnesty. This case illustrates how internal criticism grounded in academic expertise can be reframed as a criminal offense, creating a chilling effect on academic discourse.

The case of Ramsiah demonstrates how even criticism related to student services and public communication can trigger criminal retaliation. Ramsiah, a lecturer at Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin (UIN Makassar), criticized the unilateral decision of the Deputy Dean III to shut down the "Syiar Radio" broadcast, an important platform for student expression and dissemination of academic activities. Her criticism, which should have been handled through collegial dialogue or faculty governance mechanisms, prompted a police complaint instead. The use of law enforcement to silence disagreement over administrative decisions underscores a broader trend in which managerial discomfort is interpreted as reputational harm warranting criminal prosecution.

In addition, the case of Ubedillah Badrn reveals the vulnerability of academics when their criticism touches on sensitive issues such as corruption (KKN) or academic misconduct. Ubedillah, a lecturer at Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ), was reported to the police after raising concerns about alleged corruption involving university leadership, as well as the suspected plagiarism of a doctoral student's dissertation. Rather than initiating an investigation into the alleged wrongdoing, university leaders chose to respond by framing the criticism as defamation. This mirrors a broader pattern in which whistleblowing and academic oversight—core components of academic responsibility—are instead treated as acts of reputational damage subject to criminal sanction.

The above cases demonstrate the criminalisation of lecturers who expressed their opinions on various issues occurring at the universities where they work. These acts of criminalisation can be categorised into three forms. The first is, criminalization of criticism, wherein faculty members become targets of criminal investigations and legal action for expressing concerns or criticism regarding leadership, governance, and ethical practices. This, when viewed through the concept of freedom of

expression, constitutes a violation of the proper handling of differing opinions and a breach of the principle of freedom of speech.<sup>29</sup>

The second form pertains to the use of legal mechanisms to silence dissent. In many cases, university leaders use legal systems, such as defamation laws contained in the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (ITE Law) or criminal laws, to suppress criticism.<sup>30</sup> This causes lecturers who share similar concerns to remain silent about malpractice occurring at the university. As Bernasconi explains, the hegemony of law to silence dissent has ultimately diminished university members' awareness of academic freedom as the core that defines a university.<sup>31</sup>

The third form relates to authoritarian university leadership. Several cases described in Table 1 reveal patterns of authoritarianism in university management, where institutional control is prioritized over academic autonomy. Leaders involved in these cases use their positions to silence dissent, rather than to respond to and resolve emerging issues. Violations by university leaders, whether administrative or criminal, become irrelevant to resolve because the institution can use its power to hide unpleasant truths.

The three forms of criminalization described above indicate a significant threat to academic freedom and freedom of expression across various universities in Indonesia. In Nugroho's view, university leaders have become a source of repression against academics when their activities are considered disruptive to stability.<sup>32</sup> The criminalization of criticism, whether it concerns leadership failures, ethical violations, or corruption, not only silences dissent but also undermines the integrity of universities as spaces for intellectual freedom. This also has an effect on the wider academic community, wherein lecturers and students experience fear of speaking out due to the risk of criminalization, loss of employment, and legal action. This chilling effect weakens the role of universities as spaces for free and open inquiry.

## VI. STUDENT PRESS CENSORSHIP

Repression in universities impacts not only lecturers, but also student press agencies. Repression measures are carried out by university leaders in various forms, including by suspending the student press organization, reporting students to the authorities, and creating administrative obstacles that complicate their academic progress.

29 Doni Hermawan, "Dibui karena Kritikan di Grup WA, Amnesti Dosen Unsyiah Diperjuangkan", (2021), online: *IDN Times* <<https://sumut.idntimes.com/news/indonesia/doni-hermawan-1/dibui-karena-kritikan-di-grup-wa-amnesti-dosen-unsyiah-diperjuangkan>>.

30 Ichwan Prasetyo, "Dosen UIN Alauddin Makassar Dikriminalisasi dengan UU ITE", (2021), online: *Solo Pos* <<https://news.solopos.com/dosen-uin-alauddin-makassar-dikriminalisasi-dengan-uu-ite-1170835>>.

31 Andrés Bernasconi, "Latin America: Weak academic freedom within strong university autonomy" (2025) 14:1 *Glob Const* 96-99, online: <<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/global-constitutionalism/article/latin-america-weak-academic-freedom-within-strong-university-autonomy/B769AEE2E20A248DD4578ED1356E23FD>>.

32 Stefani Nugroho, "In the Name of the Nation: Restriction on Academic Freedom in Contemporary Indonesia Higher Education" in *New Threat to Acad Free Asia* (Columbia University Press, 2023) 134-139.

Between 2020-2021, the Indonesian Student Press Association (PPMI) recorded 48 cases of university management intimidating and dismissing editorial staff, out of 185 violations of press freedom across various campuses.<sup>33</sup> These violations included threats, intimidation, physical assault, media shutdowns, and students being forcibly removed from campus for journalistic work. The table below details a number of student press agencies that have been subjected to censorship from the campus.

Table 2: Cases of student press censorship

Press Office Name	Censorship Act
Lintas Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Ambon (2022)	Reported to the police for reporting cases of alleged sexual harassment at IAIN Ambon.
Suara Universitas Sumatera Utara (USU) (2019)	Publication and management frozen due to the publication of a short story ( <i>cerpen</i> ) which included LGBTQ+ characters.
Balairung Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) (2019)	Journalist investigated by the police for reporting a case of rape of UGM student.
Poros Universitas Ahmad Dahlan (UAD) (2016)	Threats of freezing for criticizing the development of UAD campus medical faculty.
Pendapa Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa (UST) (2016)	University authorities threatened to freeze the student press agency following its report on the MIPA Faculty's failure to graduate students.
Lentera Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana (UKSW) (2015)	Dismissed by the rectorate and the police for their report on the 1965 events in Salatiga
Expedisi Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY) (2014)	Withdrawal of the bulletin due to a report criticising the practice of Study Orientation and Campus Introduction.

These forms of repression can be categorized into three types. The first pertains to repression taking the form of punitive reactions to criticism. When faced with reports written and published by student journalists on issues like sexual violence or educational policies, university leaders tend to respond by reporting them to the

<sup>33</sup> Andreas Harsono, "Indonesia: Lembaga Pers Mahasiswa dalam Risiko Wartawan Kampus Hadapi Intimidasi, Sensor, Bredel", (2023), online: *Hum Right Watch* <<https://www.hrw.org/id/news/2023/05/20/indonesia-student-media-risk>>.

police, suspending their leadership, censoring their publications, or even revoking their student status. This takes place because student journalists are seen by universities as challenging campus authority.

Secondly, universities often act as guardians of their own public image by exerting institutional control over narratives and treating dissent or critical speech as transgression. This occurs, as Handler observes, because universities are increasingly adopting corporate management practices to enhance their public image in order to compete for financial gain.<sup>34</sup> This shift has led to a focus on ceremonial discourse, and practices that distract attention from critical speech that could damage the image of the institution. Universities that adopt corporate-style management prioritize image-building campaigns and activities. As a result, universities becomes less willing to tolerate or engage with critical analysis, investigative reporting, or discussions that question institutional problems.

These university strategies often involve suppressing critical speech that is considered damaging.<sup>35</sup> As a result, news published by student journalists that is considered controversial or has the potential to negatively affect the university's image is considered a violation by the university leadership. This can be seen in the statement from USU, which said that the student press should report on campus activities and achievements, rather than controversial topics such as the LGBTQ+ community.<sup>36</sup> A similar sentiment was expressed by the Rector of IAIN Ambon, who deemed that Lintas' news report had defamed the university.<sup>37</sup> In the cases of Lentera UKSW<sup>38</sup> and Expedisi UNY, university leaders withdrew publications.<sup>39</sup>

The third types of repression includes oppression through legal and administrative means. This pattern can be seen in the censorship carried out by university leaders through structural measures, namely the freezing of press institutions, police involvement, and forced signing of integrity pacts. The fourth type involves controlling journalistic independence. This pattern can be seen in cases of university leaders replacing editorial teams and suspending websites to control content production and publication, as experienced by students at Lintas IAIN

34 Richard Handler, "Auto-ethnography from two gilded ages: Thorstein Veblen, Bonnie Urciuoli and the higher learning in the United States" (2019) 60:1 *Cult Theory Crit* 6-10.

35 Paula Tjatoerwidya Anggarina, Agustinus Purna Irawan & Fransisca Iriani Roesmala Dewi, "Higher education reputation management through increasing the role of public relations" (2024) 12:3 *Humanit Soc Sci Lett* 692-695, online: <<https://www.scopus.com/record/display.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85209595004&origin=scopusAI>>.

36 Anugerah Adriansyah, "Kasus Cerpen LGBT di USU Berlanjut ke Ranah Hukum", (2019), online: *VOA Indones* <<https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/kasus-cerpen-lgbt-di-usu-berlanjut-ke-ranah-hukum/5030841.html>>.

37 Dewi Nurita, "Rektor IAIN Ambon Bredel Pers Kampus", (2022), online: *Tempo.co* <<https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1571854/rektor-iain-ambon-bredel-pers-kampus>>.

38 Syahrul Munir, "Kasus Penarikan Majalah 'Lentera' yang Bahas soal PKI, Dilaporkan ke Komnas HAM", (2015), online: *Kompas.com* <[https://regional.kompas.com/read/2015/10/20/11112601/Kasus.Penarikan.Majalah.Lentera.yang.Bahas.soal.PKI.Dilaporkan.ke.Komnas.HAM.#google\\_vignette](https://regional.kompas.com/read/2015/10/20/11112601/Kasus.Penarikan.Majalah.Lentera.yang.Bahas.soal.PKI.Dilaporkan.ke.Komnas.HAM.#google_vignette)>.

39 Nindias Nur Khalika & Mira Tri Rahayu, "Demonstrasi Warnai Pembredelan EXPEDISI", (2014), online: *Balairung Press* <<https://www.balairungpress.com/2014/09/demonstrasi-warnai-pembredelan-expedisi/>>.

Ambon, Suara USU, and Poros UAD.<sup>40</sup> These actions delegitimize and silence dissenting opinions, thereby creating a chilling effect on freedom of expression, damaging credibility, and isolating students from the wider environment.<sup>41</sup>

The above incidents reveal a systematic pattern of censorship and repression targeting student press organizations at various universities in Indonesia. These incidents reveal tensions between the right to convey truth to those in power, and authoritarian reflexes of university leaders seeking to protect their reputation and maintain institutional control. In all the cases described, freedom of expression was restricted not based on legal boundaries, but due to criticism of institutional failures, controversial publications, and perceived threats to the university's reputation. In a report released by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the act of student journalism fulfills the civic function of holding institutions accountable.<sup>42</sup> In many ways, universities are analogous to self-contained cities, and the presence of student journalists monitors the provision of various services and reports on matters of concern to the community.

## VII. PROHIBITION AND DISSOLUTION OF PUBLIC DISCUSSIONS

The prohibition and dissolution of public debate is another example of repression of academic freedom in university settings. Repression of discussions within the campus community is usually carried out by the university leadership directly, or by the police through the campus leadership. In the cases below, discussions organized by lecturers and students were dissolved because they were perceived as disturbing political stability by raising themes that challenge dominant views.

Table 3: Cases of prohibition and dissolution of discussions in university

Discussion Organizer	Discussion Topics
BEM Alliance Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS) (2023)	Alleged embezzlement by two professors and corruption cases at UNS.
Students of Jayapura University of Science and Technology (2022)	Forced dismantling of free-of-charge action by the police.
Indonesia People's Assembly (2022)	Public discussions at the G20 Summit at Udayana University.

40 Redaksi Persma, “Kronologi Pembredelan Pers Mahasiswa POROS Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Yogyakarta”, (2016), online: *Persma.id* <<https://www.persma.id/kronologi-pembredelan-pers-mahasiswa-poros-universitas-ahmad-dahlan-yogyakarta/>>.

41 Subarno Chattarji, “Student protests, media and the university in india” (2019) 22:1 Postcolonial Stud 79-82.

42 AAUP, “Threats to the Independence of Student Media”, (2016), online: <<https://www.aaup.org/report/threats-independence-student-media>>.

Constitutional Law and Society at Faculty of Law, UGM (2020)	Resignation of the president reviewed from the state system.
National Student Democratic Union (SDMN), National Student Front (FMN), and Papuan Student Alliance (AMP) (2019)	Dynamics of Jokowi's post-election rule.
Teropong Student Press Agency (2019)	Papua in the mainstream media perspective.
National Committee of Papua Barat (2018)	Reflection of the 10-year journey of the National Committee of West Papua.
Papau Student Alliance (2018)	Screening of the movie 20 Years of Biak Berdarah
Students of Universitas Negeri Malang (UNM) (2018)	Seminar on the history of the 1965 events and communism.
Study Club Komaka of Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII) (2017-2019)	Discussions with former Witness and Victim Protection Agency (LPSK) Chairman Abdul Haris Semendawai, book review <i>Kitab Pembebasan</i> by Eko Prasetyo, and discussion about sexual abuse cases.
Students of Faculty of Law, Universitas Diponegoro (2015)	LGBTQ+ community in society.
Students of Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Brawijaya (2015)	The rights of minorities in a globalized world.

Actions taken to prohibit and disperse public discussions have occurred at a number of universities in Indonesia, and can be classified into three categories. The first category involves university authorities engaging in attempts to suppress social and political discourse. In several cases in the table above, discussions surrounding university leadership, government policies, historical events, and minority rights are often subject to pressure, and are part of a broader trend of political suppression within academic spaces. According to Dutta's analysis of neoliberal university governance, institutions increasingly deploy surveillance mechanisms and

disciplinary actions under the guise of maintaining decency and order.<sup>43</sup> These practices, he argues, are designed to counter dissent and reinforce administrative control. This framework offers an explanation for the patterns observed in Indonesia, where university authorities prohibit and disperse public discussions as a way to regulate criticism and preserve institutional conformity.

Secondly, number of cases in Table 3 were coordinated efforts involving external actor such as the police or government agencies.<sup>44</sup> This demonstrates the political nature of censorship, whereby the university space is used as a mechanism to prevent dissent. When external actors, particularly the police, interfere in academic activities, it shows that interference in academic discussion is not merely an administrative issue, but rather a political act. In countries such as Hungary and Turkey, repression targeting universities has been used by governments as a strategy to align higher education with neoliberal and fascist interests.<sup>45</sup> In Zimbabwe, the placement of government spies and security agents in universities has created a climate of fear and self-censorship among students and faculty.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, in Delhi, police used illegal methods to obstruct research and intimidate lecturers.<sup>47</sup> This measure is often used to suppress opinions considered contrary to dominant narratives, thereby marginalizing critical alternative voices. Continued interference can narrow the space for healthy public debate where individuals can freely express their opinions and seek solutions to the problems they face.

Third, repression of discussions raising issues about Papua,<sup>48</sup> communism,<sup>49</sup> and LGBTQ+ rights<sup>50</sup> not only reflect political censorship, but also social and ideological control. These topics challenge prevailing narratives and are therefore considered unacceptable for public discussion. The ban on discussing these topics is more than just an attempt to regulate what can be said; it is also related to control over the dominant culture and ideology through de-legitimization of views considered contrary to national and social values. These restrictions exacerbate the

43 Mohan J Dutta, “Universities, civility, and repression in the age of new media: Surveillance capital and resistance” in *Civility, Free Speech, Acad Free High Educ Fac Margins* (Taylor and Francis, 2021) 41.

44 Haris Prabowo, “Diskusi di Kampus Unud Dibubarkan Paksa Sehari sebelum KTT G20”, (2022), online: *Tirto.id* <<https://tirto.id/diskusi-di-kampus-unud-dibubarkan-paksa-sehari-sebelum-ktt-g20-gyAS>>.

45 Pinar E Dönmez & Anil Duman, “Marketisation of Academia and Authoritarian Governments: The Cases of Hungary and Turkey in Critical Perspective” (2021) 47:7 Crit Sociol 1127–1130.

46 Simbarashe Gukurume, “Surveillance, spying and disciplining the university: deployment of state security agents on campus in Zimbabwe” (2019) 54:5 J Asian Afr Stud 763–767.

47 Ujjwal Kumar Singh & Nandini Sundar, “Police States and Academic Freedom” (2010) Econ Polit Wkly 8–9.

48 CNN Indonesia, “Rektorat Ancam Bubarkan Pers Kampus Usai Diskusi Papua”, (2019), online: *CNN Indonesia* <<https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20191011193643-20-438861/rektorat-ancam-bubarkan-pers-kampus-usai-diskusi-papua>>.

49 BBC Indonesia, “Berulang kali dibubarkan, mengapa diskusi sejarah dianggap momok?”, (2018), online: *BBC News Indones* <<https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-45836811>>.

50 Ahmad Fauzan, “ITB Bubarkan Diskusi LGBT”, (2016), online: <<https://kabarkampus.com/2016/02/itb-bubarkan-diskusi-lgbt/>>.

marginalization of already vulnerable communities, eliminating space to voice their experiences, hopes, and struggles.

These forms of prohibition and disruption of public discussion demonstrate ongoing challenges in the practice of academic freedom and freedom of expression in Indonesia. A number of incidents, as outlined in Table 3 above, show that restrictions and disruptions of public discussions on sensitive topics are a coordinated political effort by university leadership and external actors to maintain control over the ideas and narratives permitted for discussion in academic spaces. University leaders, in this case, do not always act as guardians of academic freedom, but rather become part of a mechanism that ensures that only narratives deemed safe by the state can circulate. By regulating what can be discussed, the state seeks to shape collective thought and ensure that opinions that do not align with state interests are not given space to develop.

### VIII. THE PERSISTENCE OF REPRESSION OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN UNIVERSITIES

The findings of this research collectively indicate that repression of academic freedom occurs for a number of reasons. In some cases, it is an effort to discipline academics by controlling research, publication, and institutions. This is done through the banning or dissolution of discussions that criticize government policies. In these cases, the government uses the state apparatus to put pressure on the organizers of the discussion. On other occasions, the government has also used the authority of the university leadership to dissolve the debate. Existing regulations authorize governments to appoint university rectors at their discretion, ensuring that the power of the rector can be fully exercised according to the wishes of the government.

Another reason behind the repression of academic freedom is the culture of neo-feudalism demonstrated by the leaders of various universities.<sup>51</sup> This culture refers to a pattern of power relations in which university leaders exercise authority in a hierarchical, personal, and loyalty-based manner, resembling the structure of a traditional feudal system. In such an environment, authority is not based on collegiality, academic achievement, or transparent governance, but rather on the dominance of those who occupy higher structural positions. This leads to an atmosphere where differences of opinion are equated with disloyalty and academic criticism is interpreted not as part of scholarly responsibility but as a threat to the status of leaders. As a result, institutional decision-making becomes highly centralised and individuals who oppose policies are removed, marginalised, or silenced to protect the symbols of leadership. Thus, neo-feudalism explains that criticism by both lecturers and students is met with hostility because it disrupts the social hierarchy and the respect accorded to those in power.

The third reason relates to legal frameworks for protecting academic freedom. In Indonesia, the rules concerning academic freedom can only be found in the 2012 Law No. 12 on Higher Education. In this law, the meaning of the term "academic

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<sup>51</sup> Wiratraman, *supra* note 7.

“freedom” also known as “freedom of academic discretion” is limited to the authority of professors or lecturers to make public statements about topics that favour their academic community and discipline. Looking at the relevant articles in the law, two implications emerge. First, the law does not recognize students as holders of academic freedom, even though they possess the same autonomy of producing knowledge within the university. Second, the law’s vague principles and lack of detailed parameters narrow the meaning of academic freedom, allowing these principles to be used as a justification for attacking lecturers and students who criticize campus and government policy.

The findings of this study show that the repression of academic freedom by university leaders in Indonesia has contributed to the broader suppression of human rights. Normatively, the repression of academic freedom violates Article 12 and Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, limiting access to diverse perspectives and critical thinking, both of which are essential components of a quality education. In Quinn & Levine’s view, violations of academic freedom are a precursor to other human rights violations.<sup>52</sup> Suppression of academic freedom limits individuals’ capacity to critically analyse social issues and challenge established norms—a processes essential to societal development. Such repression prevents lecturers and students from engaging with sensitive social and political topics, thereby diminishing the production of knowledge and the pursuit of solutions to societal challenges

Instead of focusing on student demands, university administrations have labelled student movements with various accusations. In Australia, the student solidarity movement for Palestine, which demands that universities withdraw from companies that profit financially from the conflict, has been labelled as supporting terrorism and antisemitism. A similar pattern is evident in the repression of discussions about Papua province by Indonesian students, which are considered as efforts to support the rebel movements in the area and are thus considered treasonous acts against the state.

Although the repression of academic freedom is a global phenomenon,<sup>53</sup> this study illustrates how government intervention, legal restrictions, and institutional control are dominant factors in the occurrence of academic repression in Indonesia. According to Wicaksana, this is influenced by a lack of human rights protections related to academic freedom in Indonesia, wherein criticism from lecturers, students, and researchers is considered a threat to the authorities.<sup>54</sup>

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52 Robert Quinn & Jesse Levine, “Intellectual-Human Rights Defenders and Claims for Academic Freedom under Human Rights Law” (2014) 3:2 *Int Hum Rights Law Rev* 209–212, online: <[https://brill.com/view/journals/hrlr/3/2/article-p209\\_2.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/hrlr/3/2/article-p209_2.xml)>.

53 Piya Chatterjee & Sunaina Maira, *The imperial university: Academic repression and scholarly dissent* (U of Minnesota Press, 2014) 18; Steven Best, Peter McLaren & Anthony J Nocella, *Academic repression: Reflections from the academic industrial complex* (AK Press Oakland, CA, 2010) 5–10; Erik Juergensmeyer, Anthony J. Nocella II & Mark Seis, *supra* note 11.

54 Satria Unggul Wicaksana Prakasa, “Paradigm of Law and Human Rights as a Protection of Academic Freedom in Indonesia” (2023) 2:1 *Hum Rights Glob South* 37–41, online: <<https://journal.sepaham.or.id/index.php/HRGS/article/view/41>>; Satria Unggul Wicaksana Prakasa, “Paradigm of Law and Human Rights as a Protection of Academic Freedom in

The findings above suggest that academic repression is caused by a combination of cultural, institutional, and jurisprudential factors. The authors suggest a revision of the Higher Education Act No. 12 of 2011 to include explicit legal protection for students, who currently lack a clear legal basis for exercising academic freedom. Additionally, the law should ensure that academic freedom extends to the entire academic community, including lecturers, students, and staff, so that all members of higher education institutions can express their academic views freely in public.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) defines academic freedom as the freedom to express opinions about an institution or system without discrimination, fear, or pressure from the state or other actors. It also includes the freedom of academic staff to participate in professional academic activities while enjoying internationally recognized human rights on an equal basis with others. Academic freedom further encompasses the obligation to respect the academic freedom of others, to allow conflicting views to be discussed constructively, and to treat all individuals without discrimination. The conception of academic freedom articulated in the General Comment on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights offers an open framework that helps fill the regulatory gaps left by the Higher Education Act. Future frameworks should acknowledge eleven freedoms related to academic expression: (1) pursue; (2) develop; (3) disseminate knowledge and ideas; (4) research; (5) teaching; (6) study; (7) discussion; (8) documentation; (9) production; (10) creation; and (11) writing.<sup>55</sup>

The regulatory gaps noted above can be addressed through the ICESCR General Comment for three reasons. Firstly, the breadth of the definition provided in the General Comment is significant. The clause stating that members of the academic community may “express opinions freely about the institution or system in which they work” illustrates the wide scope of academic freedom, which is not found in the Higher Education Act. In the Act, academic freedom is narrowly defined and limited to the freedom of expression exercised by lecturers in relation to their specific areas of expertise. Second, the General Comment broadens the notion of who holds academic freedom, extending it not only to lecturers but to the entire academic community. Third, academic freedom is further reinforced by the explicit prohibition of state or institutional interference, as reflected in the clause allowing academic staff to carry out their duties “without discrimination, fear, or pressure from the state or other actors.” This clause significantly strengthens the position of the academic community in fulfilling its responsibilities.

Finally, the findings of this study recommend that Indonesian universities should retain autonomy in order to ensure respect for academic freedom. In this context, autonomy refers not merely to administrative independence, but to the substantive ability of universities to protect academic activities from both external political interference and internal authoritarian practices. As Kudla et al. explain, academic

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Indonesia” (2023) 2:1 Hum Rights Glob South 37-41, online: <<https://journal.sepaham.or.id/index.php/HRGS/article/view/41>>.

<sup>55</sup> *Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 13 (Twenty-first session, 1999) The right to education (article 13 of the Covenant)*, 1999.

freedom is a fundamental right, and its holders must be shielded from intervention by the state as well as by university or faculty authorities.<sup>56</sup> This means that academics must not only be safeguarded from state pressure, but also from institutional leaders who may use their regulatory powers to silence criticism. Similarly, students engaged in critical discussions or activism, whether related to internal university policies or government actions, must also receive protection. University autonomy should therefore function as a structural safeguard that enables lecturers and students to think independently, express their views freely, and contribute to the public interest through the production and dissemination of knowledge.

## XI. CONCLUSION

This article provides evidence of three main forms of repression against academic freedom within Indonesian universities. Firstly, pressure is directed at lecturers who criticize university leadership, whether concerning university-wide policies or decisions made at the faculty level. Secondly, attempts to censor, suspend, or disperse the activities of student press agencies that publish content critical of university leaders. Third, repression is carried out through the banning and dissolution of public discussions organized by students, particularly those that critique university leadership or government policies. This pattern of oppression is perpetrated not only by the government but also by authoritarian campus leaders, resulting in an environment that constrains both academic freedom and freedom of expression.

This article identifies several factors contributing to these acts, including efforts to discipline academics through control over research, publications, and institutions; a neo-feudal culture led by campus leaders who view criticism as a personal attack; and a minimal legal framework to protect academic freedom, which ultimately leads to fear and silencing. In this context, the importance of revising Indonesia's Higher Education Law is strongly encouraged by the authors, in order to provide clearer protection for lecturers and students as holders of academic freedom rights. Although common in many countries, there is a particularly close link between repression of academic freedom and political and economic interests in Indonesia. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure the protection of academic freedom, not only through internal campus policies but also by strengthening the legal framework that safeguards these rights comprehensively.

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56 Monika Stachowiak-Kudła et al, "Academic Freedom as a Defensive Right" (2023) 15:1 Hague J Rule Law 161–165, online: <<https://link.springer.com/10.1007/s40803-022-00188-4>>.

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