

## Strengthening Public Legal Critical Awareness Through The Book Launch of "Mengapa Hukum Dipermainkan?" Why Is The Law Manipulated?

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### **Abstract.**

*The low level of legal understanding among the public is one of the main reasons why law can easily be manipulated by those in power. Communities that are unaware of their rights tend to accept injustice without resistance. Arising from this condition, this community service activity was carried out through the launch and book discussion of "Mengapa Hukum Dipermainkan?" [Why Is the Law Manipulated?] by Eka Putra Zakran, SH., MH., as a means of education and strengthening the public's critical attitude toward the existing legal system. The event was attended by participants from various backgrounds, ranging from students, community leaders, and members of advocate organizations to local government representatives. The implementation methods included an open book launch, a book discussion session, interactive discussions, and a direct question-and-answer session with the author and resource persons. The results showed a significant increase in participants' understanding of their legal rights, as well as the growth of a critical attitude in evaluating law enforcement processes in their surroundings. This program is expected to serve as a starting point for the formation of a legally literate society that is willing to question injustice.*

**Keywords:** *Legal Literacy, Legal Critical Awareness, Book Launch, Community Services and Legal Consciousness.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The law should stand firm for everyone without discrimination. Yet the reality in Indonesia often shows the opposite. The public witnesses how legal processes can unfold differently depending on who is involved. Those with power or money can escape the grip of the law with ease, while ordinary citizens find themselves trapped in convoluted and unfair procedures. This condition has gradually eroded public trust in the existing legal system.

The problem does not lie solely in the legal system or law enforcement officers. There is another equally important factor: the low level of legal understanding in society. Soekanto [13] states that legal awareness refers to the values that live within a person regarding both existing law and the law that is hoped for. Without such awareness, communities do not know what their rights are, do not understand when they have been harmed, and ultimately are unable to demand what they deserve. Alfiannur [1] notes that among the factors causing low legal compliance in society are indifference to applicable laws and the lack of courage to confront injustice. This is not merely an individual problem, but one that recurs across generations.

Data from the national survey by Indikator Politik Indonesia in February 2023 revealed that only around 35% of the public considered the current state of law enforcement in Indonesia to be good or very good, while 29.6% rated it poor or very poor. These figures reflect how low public trust in legal institutions has become. *Transparency International* Indonesia [15] also notes that Indonesia's judicial system continues to face corruption issues involving various actors, ranging from police officers and prosecutors to judges. In such a situation, communities lacking adequate legal knowledge will continue to be the most disadvantaged.

Rosana [12] explains that genuine legal compliance does not stem from fear of sanctions, but from the awareness that law indeed needs to be upheld for the common good. This means that communities need to understand the law not only as a binding set of rules, but also as a protective instrument that should be on their side. Lestari and Putra [7] assert that integrating legal literacy into community life has become an urgent need amid the rapid spread of digital disinformation, which often worsens the public's legal understanding.

In response to this need, Eka Putra Zakran, SH., MH., Chair of the Central Executive Board of the Indonesian Statesman Advocates Association (DPP AdNI), published a book titled "Mengapa Hukum Dipermainkan?" [Why Is the Law Manipulated?] [4]. This book was written not merely for academic consumption, but to reach a broad audience that wishes to understand the state of law from a perspective close to everyday life. Nugroho [8] states that legal education for the public must be carried out continuously with approaches suited to real-life contexts, not solely through formal educational channels. This community service activity was therefore designed to leverage the book launch as a space for education and open discussion, bringing together academics, legal practitioners, and ordinary citizens.

This activity aims to enhance the public's understanding of their legal rights, foster a critical attitude toward unjust legal practices, and open spaces for reflection that are rarely available to ordinary citizens. Through a direct, open, and discussion-based approach, it is hoped that communities will no longer be passive objects within the legal system, but active subjects capable of monitoring and questioning law enforcement processes in their surroundings.

## **II. COMMUNITY SERVICE METHODS**

This community service activity was carried out in three interrelated stages: the preparation stage, the implementation stage, and the evaluation stage. The following is a description of each stage.

### **a. Preparation Stage**

This stage began with coordination among the service team, the DPP AdNI Central Executive Board as the event organizer, the book's author, and Hotel Madani Medan as the venue. The team developed an event concept that was not merely ceremonial but carried strong educational content. Presentation materials were prepared to describe the book's content concisely and engagingly, while also mapping the legal issues most frequently experienced by the public. Invitations were distributed to students, community leaders, members of advocate organizations, and representatives from local government agencies. The team also prepared a pre-event questionnaire to assess participants' initial understanding of their legal rights.

### **b. Implementation Stage**

The activity took place at Hotel Madani Medan on Saturday, April 11, 2026, attended by approximately 50 participants from various backgrounds. The event opened with remarks from the head of the service team and a representative of DPP AdNI, followed by a book signing and official launch by its author, Eka Putra Zakran, SH., MH. The core of the event was a book discussion session featuring two resource persons: the Deputy Chair of the Medan City MUI for Legal Affairs, Dr. Majda El Muhtaj, who viewed the book's theme as a classic issue that remains highly relevant today, and a representative from the Legal Division of the Medan City Government Secretariat representing the governmental element. This session was followed by an interactive discussion and question-and-answer session, where participants were given space to raise questions, share experiences, or discuss legal situations they had personally encountered.

### **c. Evaluation and Follow-Up Stage**

Evaluation was conducted through a post-event questionnaire that measured participants' understanding after attending, their change in perception regarding law enforcement, and the overall meaningfulness of the activity. The team also conducted brief interviews with several participants to obtain more in-depth feedback. As a follow-up measure, the team established an online discussion group so that participants could continue dialoguing about current legal issues after the event, ensuring that the critical spirit that had been cultivated would not stop at a single moment.

## **III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Results of the Community Service Activity**

The book launch event "Mengapa Hukum Dipermainkan?" [Why Is the Law Manipulated?] ran smoothly and received an enthusiastic response from participants. Several achievements resulting from this activity are as follows.

The activity successfully enhanced participants' understanding of the basic legal rights held by every citizen, including the right to legal assistance, the right to a fair trial process, and the right to object to

decisions considered unjust. Many participants acknowledged that they had only become aware of these rights after attending this event, highlighting how wide the gap is between written legal norms and the public's actual legal knowledge.

The book discussion and open dialogue sessions opened a space for reflection that had previously been unavailable to the general public. Participants who initially felt powerless in the face of the legal system began to realize that there are concrete steps they can take when confronting injustice, such as reporting to the Ombudsman, utilizing free legal aid services, or filing complaints about officials' conduct with the relevant supervisory bodies.

From the post-event questionnaire results, as many as 82% of participants stated that the activity was very beneficial for them. Approximately 75% of participants also reported that after attending, they felt more confident in questioning legal processes they experienced or witnessed in their surroundings.

An online discussion community was formed following the event as a continuation of efforts to strengthen legal literacy in society. This community serves as a platform for participants to continue sharing information, discussing current legal cases, and informing those around them of their legal rights.



**Fig. 1: The Book Launch of "Mengapa Hukum Dipermainkan?" [Why Is the Law Manipulated?] by Eka Putra Zakran, SH., MH. at Hotel Madani Medan, April 11, 2026]**

## 2. The Phenomenon of Law Being Manipulated in Indonesia

Eka Putra Zakran [4] derived the title of his book from a question that has long been circulating in society. He writes that the question “mengapa hukum dipermainkan” [why is the law manipulated] may appear simple, yet is in fact deeply meaningful because it touches on the ethics and morality of law enforcement officials as instruments of legal enforcement in Indonesia. This question did not arise from theoretical debate, but from the real experiences of communities over time. Rahardjo [11] also reminds us that law cannot be separated from the social context in which it is applied. When that social context is characterized by power inequality and entrenched corruption, the law becomes vulnerable to being used by the powerful to oppress the weak.

Some of the most common concrete manifestations of this phenomenon in Indonesia include sentencing disparity, whereby perpetrators of crimes with connections to power receive far lighter sentences than others who commit similar offenses but have no resources whatsoever. There is also the phenomenon of criminalization, where the law is used precisely to ensnare those who should be protected. Komnas HAM [5] has recorded human rights violations in various legal processes, including detention without sufficient evidence and procedures that do not comply with the rules. Meanwhile, the University of Indonesia Center for Law Studies [10] found that the high costs within the judicial system represent a major barrier for low-income communities in accessing equal justice.

In his book, Eka Putra Zakran references the theory of Lawrence M. Friedman, which identifies three mutually reinforcing and inseparable instruments of law enforcement: legal substance, legal structure, and legal culture. When any one of these is weakened, the entire edifice of law becomes unstable. In Indonesia, all three continue to face challenges that have not been fully resolved. Candra and Sinaga [3] assert that effective law enforcement is not solely the responsibility of officials, but also requires active community

participation. When communities do not understand the law, they cannot serve as effective watchdogs, and this condition continues to be exploited by those with vested interests.

Notably, the discussions that emerged during the book discussion session also touched on the role of advocates in upholding the rule of law. The Deputy Chair of the Medan City MUI for Legal Affairs, Dr. Majda El Muhtaj, who served as a discussant at the event, viewed the book's theme as a classic issue that remains highly relevant to this day. He described the current situation as a form of "legal drought," in which the values of justice no longer flow as they should in the practice of law enforcement on the ground. This statement further reinforces the urgency of this community service activity as a well-targeted initiative.

### **3. Understanding Basic Legal Rights and the Importance of Legal Literacy**

One of the main reasons communities easily become victims of legal injustice is that they do not know what their rights are. Yet the Indonesian constitution has clearly guaranteed various legal rights for citizens. This subject formed one of the core components of the book launch activity, with the aim that participants would leave with a practical understanding of rights they can directly apply in real life.

Every person who is investigated, arrested, or detained is entitled to legal assistance from an advocate or legal representative, even from the investigation stage. For those who cannot afford it, the state is obligated to provide free legal aid through Legal Aid Institutions (LBH) or advocates appointed by the court. Additionally, Article 28G of the 1945 Constitution guarantees every person the right to personal protection, meaning that no official is authorized to commit violence or apply physical or psychological pressure during the investigation process. Participants were also informed that court proceedings are, in principle, open to the public, and anyone has the right to attend as a form of public oversight of judicial proceedings. If a verdict is considered unjust, every party has the right to file an appeal, cassation, or even a Judicial Review (PK) to the Supreme Court.

Andraini [2] emphasizes that efforts to cultivate legal awareness cannot rely solely on one-way socialization, but must actively involve communities in the process of learning about their rights. Lestari and Putra [7] also affirm that effective legal literacy is not merely about conveying information, but involves communities in the process of thinking and discussing. These two principles formed the basis of this book launch event's format, in which the book was not only distributed as reading material but was used as a collective discussion tool encouraging participants to reflect on the legal conditions they face.

Beyond knowledge of rights, participants were also equipped with the ability to critically read legal information. In the social media era, much of the legal information circulating has been cut short, misinterpreted, or deliberately distorted for particular interests. Communities need to learn how to verify information from credible sources before believing or sharing it. Zein [16] notes that one way to improve legal awareness is by cultivating a culture of sharing accurate information within communities. When one person in a community understands the law, that knowledge has the potential to spread to others through everyday conversations.

### **4. The Active Role of Communities in Overseeing Law Enforcement**

Good law enforcement cannot rely solely on state officials. Communities play an equally important role as external watchdogs operating from outside the system. Kurniawan and Baehaqi [6] show that strengthening the role of communities in overseeing the rule of law and human rights awareness has a real impact on improving the quality of law enforcement at the local level. Soekanto [14] also explains that one of the factors influencing law enforcement is the community factor itself—namely, the extent to which communities comply with and monitor the workings of the law.

One of the simplest steps communities can take is to follow and monitor open court proceedings. The presence of the public in the courtroom is an effective form of oversight because officials tend to be more careful when they feel they are being watched. In addition, communities can actively support or join civil society organizations working in the fields of law and human rights. Equally important is the responsible use of social media. Cases of injustice that receive public attention through social media often prompt more serious handling, provided the information is spread based on facts rather than momentary emotions. Prasetya [9] notes that in the digital era, social media has become one of the real instruments for promoting accountability in law enforcement in Indonesia.

Participants were also introduced to the official reporting channels available, so that their courage to report could be translated into well-targeted action. If they experience poor public services or abuse of authority by officials, communities can report to the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia. Violations committed by the police can be reported to the National Police Commission (Kopolnas) or to the Internal Affairs Division (Propam). If the matter involves broader human rights violations, the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) is the appropriate institution to approach. Understanding the differences in the functions and authority of these bodies is a practical skill with immediate relevance to everyday life.

As a sustainability step, participants in the closing discussion session also formulated several initiatives that could be continued in their respective communities, including forming legal discussion groups in their local neighborhoods, establishing partnerships with the nearest LBH or campus law clinics, and advocating for legal literacy to be incorporated into community empowerment agendas at the village or sub-district level. Without active community participation, law enforcement will continue to experience gaps at many points, as oversight relies solely on internal systems that are prone to conflicts of interest.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The community service activity through the launch and book discussion of "Mengapa Hukum Dipermainkan?" [Why Is the Law Manipulated?] by Eka Putra Zakran, SH., MH. has successfully opened a space that was previously unavailable to the general public for discussing law openly and critically. Participants not only gained new knowledge about their legal rights, but were also invited to reflect on the current state of law enforcement and to position themselves as active participants in the oversight process.

The results of the activity demonstrate that an approach using popular book media combined with an open discussion format proved effective in improving public understanding and critical attitudes toward legal issues. Communities that initially felt unfamiliar and powerless in the face of the legal system began, after participating in this activity, to show greater confidence in using the official channels available to them.

Going forward, activities of this kind need to be expanded in reach and conducted more regularly. A just law will not realize itself without a community that understands it and is willing to uphold it. A book is a small step, but the discussion it sparks around it can cultivate an awareness far greater and more lasting than any momentary campaign.

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