



## The Effectiveness of Drugs Eradication Strategy in Indonesia: A Study on the National War on Drugs Policy

Hafiz Prasetya Akbar  
Indonesian National Police  
[hafiz.prasetya.akbar@polri.go.id](mailto:hafiz.prasetya.akbar@polri.go.id)

### ABSTRACT

*This paper evaluates the interdiction method that the Indonesian government employs in their ongoing war on drugs. The interdiction policy is divided into two components. First, reducing supply of drugs by intensifying crackdowns on illicit drug shipments from abroad and closing down hidden shipping lanes. Second, diminishing demand by enacting tough drug laws for users and traffickers alike in order to discourage the usage and labour for trafficking. This article employs a semi-systematic review methodology. The paper concludes that, like with any interdiction approach used globally, it is hampered by the balloon effect's impact of route displacement and the hydra effect of the large incentive associated with trafficking, causing the inelastic nature of the drug trade. Although this study confirms that drug interdiction strategy is ineffective and inefficient, interestingly it continues to be a popular policy among Indonesian politicians, law enforcers, and citizens, which could dissuade the desire for alternative approaches to addressing the illicit drugs issue.*

**Keywords:** drug trafficking, interdiction, drug law, drug policy, Indonesia.

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengevaluasi kebijakan pemberantasan narkoba yang kini digunakan oleh pemerintahan Indonesia dalam perangnya melawan narkoba. Kebijakan pemberantasan narkoba di Indonesia terdiri dari dua pendekatan. Pertama, mengurangi pasokan narkoba dengan mengintensifkan penangkapan jaringan pedagang narkoba dari luar negeri dan menutup jalur perdagangan tersembunyi. Kedua, mengurangi permintaan narkoba di masyarakat dengan memberlakukan undang-undang anti-narkotika yang keras untuk memberi efek deteren bagi pengguna dan pengedar. Tulisan ini berdasarkan hasil review semi-sistematik. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa, serupa dengan pendekatan pemberantasan narkoba yang digunakan secara global, pemberantasan narkoba di Indonesia terhambat oleh efek balon, yaitu perpindahan rute pengedaran dan efek hidra, yaitu insentif besar dari perdagangan narkoba yang bersifat inelastis. Meskipun studi ini mengkonfirmasi bahwa kebijakan pemberantasan narkoba terbukti tidak efektif, menariknya pendekatan ini tetap menjadi kebijakan populer di kalangan pemerintah, penegak hukum, dan masyarakat Indonesia, sehingga dapat menghalangi keinginan untuk menempuh pendekatan alternatif dalam mengatasi perdagangan narkoba.

**Kata Kunci:** perdagangan narkoba, pemberantasan narkoba, hukum anti-narkotika, kebijakan penanganan narkoba, Indonesia.

### INTRODUCTION

Globalisation has resulted in advancements in communication, transportation, and information technologies, making it possible to move goods more quickly and widely than ever before. Narcotics are no exception, and even though most states criminalise their use, the drug trade still has grown to become one of the largest industries in the world (Jenner, 2011). Akin to the exchange of licit goods, countries or regions can be classified into three categories by the lens of drug trafficking: source, transit, and destination. International agencies and state governments utilise this typology to dictate their counternarcotics policies and strategies (Kan, 2016). Due to the general

nature of trade, it is theorised that disrupting trafficking activities in one of the three mentioned countries will curtail the supply of the drug market and break the trafficking network. This approach, known colloquially as interdiction, was utilised by the United States of America to intercept illicit drugs before they reached local dealers and consumers (Chepesiuk, 2002).

The United States is not a drug-producing country; it is primarily a drug-consuming country, ranking among the world's top users of illicit substances (UNODC, 2022). As such, the more significant concern is drug addiction. Their early interdiction efforts are focused on stopping shipments crossing the Mexican border and strengthening US Coast Guard patrols. However, since the supply of drugs never appeared to cease, President Ronald Reagan shifted the approach in 1982 toward intercepting the drugs at their source, a tactic known as "Upstream Interdiction" (PBS, 2011). Along with interdiction, the US administration seeks to further disrupt the drug trafficking network by suppressing domestic demand for narcotics through harsher punishment for drug users (Neill, 2014).

Several researchers have doubted the effectiveness of the interdiction strategy implemented by the United States (e.g., (MacCoun & Reuter, 2001); (Jenner, 2011) and (Toth & Mitchell, 2018)). Other writers also discovered a similar lack of effectiveness in countries that employed interdiction in their unique manner, notably Mexico (Toro, 1995), Puerto Rico (O'Neill & Gumbrewicz, 2005) and Thailand (Daosodsai, et al., (2007)). While the interdiction results in each country are comparable, each of the research above demonstrates that each country has its distinct characteristics in terms of how the interdiction policy is implemented. The same holds for Indonesia, which has taken a similar approach to the countries listed above; however, the nature and outcome of its interdiction may vary. Thus, in order to determine the effectiveness of drug trafficking suppression in drug-consuming countries and their prevalence in terms of disrupting the drug network, the writer intends to evaluate Indonesia's interdiction strategy using the framework used by the United States to combat drug trafficking within its jurisdiction, namely by cracking down on drug shipments from overseas to cut down supply and enforcing strict drug laws to dissuade demand.

The existing body of research on the effectiveness of drug eradication strategies in Indonesia has primarily focused on supporting aspects such as the insufficient workforce of law enforcement personnel (Rachman & Kusriyah, 2020); (Laila, 2021); and (Yuhernawa & Barthos, 2021) the substantial budget associated with drug interdiction efforts (Suhartini, et al., (2019); Sinaga, et al. (2021), or the absence of comprehensive non-penal preventive policies (Warsino et al., (2020); (Jainah, 2022); and Yawan, et al., (2023)). Nevertheless, existing research has not adequately addressed the fundamental aspects pertaining to the effectiveness of the aforementioned technique. Therefore, there is still ambiguity over whether the prevalence of drug trafficking can be attributed to lacklustre resource for the current approach or the implementation of an ineffective strategy all this time.

This paper thus will explore the effectiveness of the interdiction and disruption strategy employed by Indonesia as another drug-consuming country. Similar to the United States, Indonesia has suffered as a destination for illegal narcotics due to its large population. The archipelago has over six million drug users out of a total population of 261 million (Hambali, 2017). As with the United States, Indonesia's incumbent President, Joko Widodo, has taken a "tough on drugs" stance by imprisoning abusers and sending traffickers to death row (Lynch, 2009). Based on this commonality in drug policy, this research intends to investigate Indonesia's ongoing interdiction approach and policy to suppress the influx of drugs. This paper aims to supplement the scant information on Indonesia's drug interdiction policy and seeks if there will be different outcomes from the strategy combating drugs done anywhere else in the world.

## METHODOLOGY

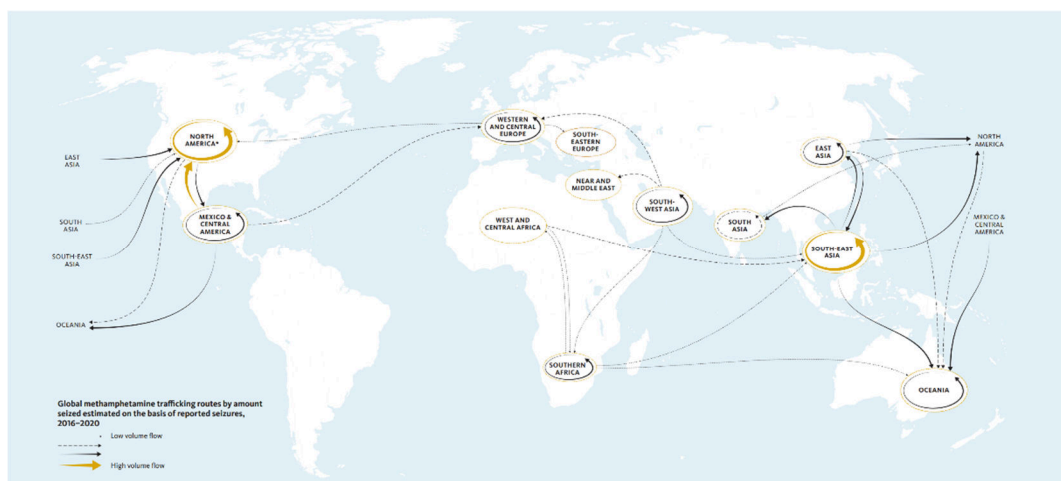
This article employs a semi-systematic review methodology. A semi-systematic review aims to provide a helicopter view or an overview of the topic (Wong, Cummings, & Ducharme, 2013). A qualitative analysis is employed to identify the results of various nations' efforts at drug interdiction and implementation of stringent drug laws, alongside Indonesia's current involvement in the ongoing war on drugs. This paper examines secondary data pertaining to illicit drug trafficking, with a particular focus on information obtained from The National Narcotics Board (NBB) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) most recent report out of 2022. The data is subsequently subjected to thematic analysis, wherein repeating concepts are identified and patterns are discerned, so enabling the formulation of a thorough summary.

Ultimately, the themes are presented in a coherent manner to address the study question and draw conclusions from the collected data. However, a limitation that should be noted is that the most recent report for UNODC in 2022 consists of data from before 2020, so when the UNODC publishes the most recent data, this research should be repeated to assess the success of drug interdiction. Thus, in order to conduct a comprehensive analysis, this study will focus on the NBB data pertaining to the drug landscape prior to 2020, with the aim of aligning it with the data provided by the UNODC.

## ANALYSIS

Indonesia's government has shown growing worry over the issue of drug abuse and illicit trade. Indonesian President Joko Widodo remarked in an interview with Al-Jazeera, "Imagine, every day 50 people (in Indonesia) die from drugs, that's 18.000 people killed by drugs every year. Within ten years that would mean 180.000 of our people killed" (Al-Jazeera, 2015). As such, 45 years after the declaration of the War on Drugs by US President Richard Nixon, President Joko Widodo followed suit by declaring "War on Drugs" on International Anti-Narcotics Day on 26 June 2016 (Handoyo & Atmosukarto, 2017). The "war" commences with the execution of 19 drug traffickers from varying international backgrounds by the President, despite international outrage (Kramer & Stoicescu, 2021). Additionally, President Joko Widodo directed the establishment of a national interdiction task force comprised of relevant national agencies to combat illicit substances entering and leaving Indonesia (National Narcotics Board, Statement by the Head of Delegation of the Republic of Indonesia at the 62nd Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs., 2019).

Prior to reviewing Indonesia's interdiction strategy, it is necessary to depict the drug trafficking networks that supply and transit the drugs that are eventually consumed in Indonesia. Cannabis, methamphetamine, and ecstasy are the most commonly used drugs in the nation, whereas cocaine and heroin use are relatively low (Kadarudin, Thamrin, & Liao, 2021).



**Image 1.** Main methamphetamine trafficking flows as described in reported seizures, 2016–2020 (UNODC, 2022)

As we can see from the figure above, the archipelago primarily receives its drugs from other Southeast Asia countries (mainly Myanmar) and Afghanistan. An explanation for this is due to the nature of Myanmar, ruled by a conflicting military regime, makes it one of Asia's most lawless countries. Corruption abounds in the military-controlled criminal justice system (Ward & Mabrey, 2014). Methamphetamine produced in Myanmar is trafficked along the Mekong River to China and Thailand for transit. Ultimately, most of the methamphetamines end up in Indonesia and the Philippines, the two most populated nations in the region (Prayuda, Warsito, & Surwandono, 2020). Recently the Indonesian National Police have also confiscated numerous shipments of methamphetamine trafficked from Iran (Nugraheni, Utomo, & Pattipelohy, 2016). According to UNODC (2022), in 2019, 84% of the crystal meth intercepted in the Near and Middle East/South-West Asia came from Iran. However, Iran only serves as a transit country, and about 90% of the methamphetamine captured in Iran in 2019 came from Afghanistan (EMCDDA, 2020). Afghanistan,

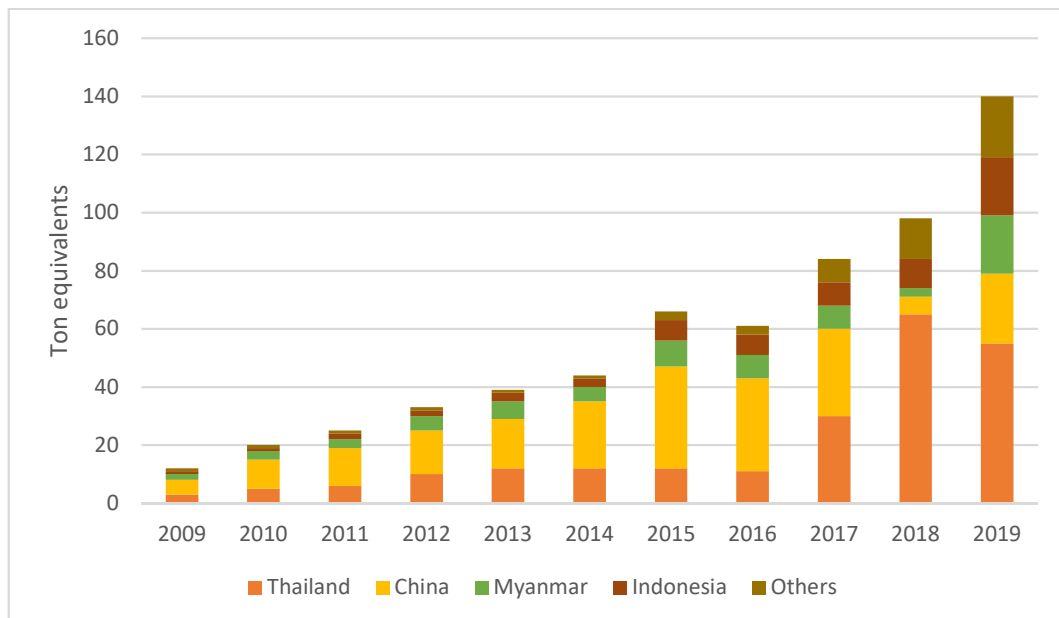
like Myanmar, exemplifies how unstable states foster not only safe havens for criminals but also the interdependence of the illegal economy for marginalised groups' survival (Gutierrez, 2020).

Next, we will examine the two approaches to the war on drugs that the Indonesian government has taken: the crackdown on illicit drug shipment and the implementation of severe anti-drug laws.

### 1. Drug Shipments Crackdown

The Indonesian National Police (INP) and the National Narcotics Board (NNB) are the entities responsible for drug control in Indonesia. Almost all of their efforts over the previous decades have been directed at eliminating drug supply and imprisoning drug traffickers. This is substantiated by the fact that both agencies combined spend five times as much on drug enforcement as they do on rehabilitation and prevention (The Conversation, 2015). Operations conducted by the INP Special Narcotics Task Force were deemed the most successful. The task force has seized more than 4,5 tons of methamphetamine in the last two years, mainly from Iran and Afghanistan (The Jakarta Post, 2021). The seizure of drugs by the INP and NNB's regional branch adds to the total amount of methamphetamine confiscated. INP and NNB have departments in every one of Indonesia's 34 provinces, and each regional chapter sets particular goals for the number of drug cases it must investigate and solve each year (Christanto, 2021). Each time an arrest occurs, high-ranking INP and NNB officials gather the media and display thousands of kilograms of drugs, claiming that the police have saved millions of lives to showcase to the public that they are winning the war on drugs (e.g., (Antara News, 2021).

The continuous drug bust hopes to shorten the supply of drugs flowing towards Indonesia and save the lives of Indonesians destined to consume those illegal goods. However, the statistics of drug abuse say otherwise. Each year, the NNB conducts a survey of the prevalence of drug usage in each of the 34 provinces. The results are a stark contrast to the crackdowns, given that drug abuse increased 36,05 percent in 2017 over 2016 and 34 percent in 2019 over 2018 (National Narcotics Board, 2017); (2020). According to the most recent data from the NBB, there was a notable rise of 851 instances involving narcotics and drugs in Indonesia in 2022. The aforementioned quantity had a growth of 11.1% in relation to the preceding year, specifically amounting to an increase of 766 instances (National Narcotics Board, 2023).

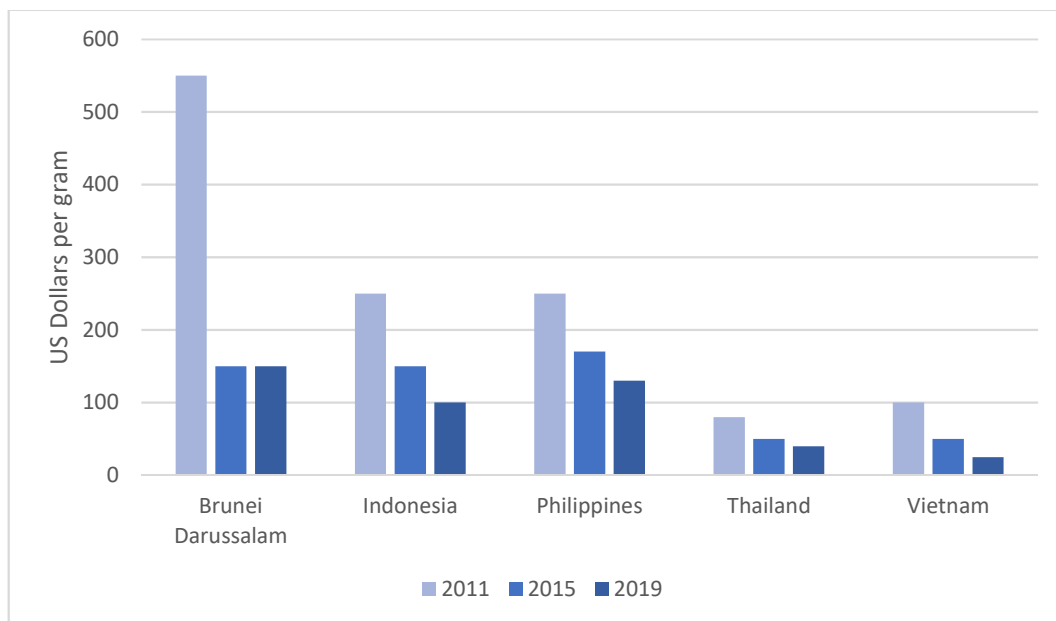


**Image 2.** Quantity of methamphetamine seized in East and South-East Asia, 2011-2019 (UNODC, 2022)

Moreover, data from UNODC indicates that the amount of methamphetamine flowing from Myanmar and Afghanistan, two of Indonesia's supply countries, has radically increased, which aggravates the rising drug abuse in Indonesia. Between 2009 and 2019, seizures of

methamphetamine from Myanmar to East and South-East Asia grew twelvefold, while seizures in Afghanistan went from 9 kg in 2014 to 1.251 kg in 2019 (UNODC, 2022).

Additionally, as the task force works tirelessly to increase arrests, the flow of methamphetamine from the source appears to continue to rise. Making the INP and NNB's efforts to curb the supply of drugs seem futile due to the massive inflow of the supply.



**Image 3.** Changes in typical prices of methamphetamine at retail level, 2011-2019 (UNODC, 2022)

From the data gathered by the UNODC, retail prices for methamphetamine have ironically decreased significantly in several East and Southeast Asian countries. Since 2011, the cost of methamphetamine in Indonesia has dropped from about 250 US dollars per gram in 2011 to 100 dollars per gram in 2019. When combined with the increased seizures, this indicates that the methamphetamine supply has increased and may have exceeded demand in the country.

While evaluating the effectiveness of supply interdiction through a crackdown on drug shipping is essential, one has to consider whether it is even possible to shut down all drug shipments in the first place. Indonesia is the world's largest island country (Cribb, 2013). With 17,508 islands and 54,720 kilometres of coastline, the archipelago's vast coast is nearly impossible to control. It was evidenced by the numerous illegal smuggling and trafficking cases through "rat ports" throughout the islands. Traffickers may be taking advantage of a perceived lack of enforcement and limited surveillance in the region by transferring drugs from boat to boat, then engaging in clandestine trade and using dead drop methods (Yuhernawa & Barthos, 2021). Additionally, Indonesia shares a 1,881-kilometres land border with Malaysia on the island of Borneo, which serves as a transit country for drugs flowing from Myanmar and other Southeast Asian countries. The border is a lush tropical jungle that conceals a network of rat trails used by drug traffickers to deliver methamphetamine to Indonesia's black market (Elyta, 2020). The Indonesian government has attempted to intensify border patrols on both the land and sea borders, focusing on known routes and intel from local informants.

## 2. Implementation of Tough Drug Law

The war on drugs is not only about interdicting the supply; the Indonesian government has also attempted to reduce the demand for drugs in the homeland. According to Indonesian National Law No. 35/2009 on Narcotics, individuals convicted of drug use may be categorised as "perpetrators or victims", whereas those charged with illegal drug sales are classified as offenders. The terminology for drug users is different according to Indonesia Supreme Court Letter No. 04/2010; users are only classified as a victim if they have a small amount of the drug for their own

use (e.g., less than 1 gram for methamphetamine) could face a minimum of four years in prison and a maximum of twelve years in prison, as well as a fine of between Rp. 800.000.000 and Rp. 8.000.000.000 (about \$50.000 - \$500.000) under articles 111 and 112 of Indonesian National Law No. 35/2009.

The determination of whether or not someone qualifies for rehabilitation is made at the discretion of the INP or NNB investigator during the inquiry stage or subsequently by a judge's decision in court (Christanto, 2021). Consequently, this policy has resulted in 90 percent of drug users are sentenced to jail rather than diverted to rehabilitation centres, regardless of their past medical history or circumstances. It is unsurprising that in 2019, out of the estimated 270.000 inmates serving time in Indonesian prisons, 54% of them were convicted of drug-related crimes, with users being the majority (Legal and Human Rights Ministry, 2019). This is worsened by the fact that the 270.000 inmates are housed in 464 facilities with a capacity of slightly more than 130.000, implying that the jails are 200 percent overcapacity. The Legal and Human Rights Ministry (2019) further stated that in 2018 indicates that 50% of narcotics trafficking occurred inside prisons, and 90% of successfully resolved narcotics cases involved prison, questioning the effectiveness of incarceration in Indonesia.

Charges against drug traffickers will naturally be far heavier than charges against drug users; under articles 113 & 114 of Indonesian National Law No. 35/2009, drug traffickers face a minimum of five years in prison and a maximum of life in prison; if the narcotics totalled more than one kilogram for plant-based drugs or one gram for synthetic drugs, then death penalty sentence is applicable. The Joko Widodo administration showed no remorse in carrying out the execution by denying clemency to all 64 prisoners sentenced to death for drug trafficking at the start of the drug war declaration, and in 2019, drug traffickers accounted for 61 percent of those facing the death penalty in Indonesia (Harm Reduction International, 2020), establishing Indonesia as one of the most prolific executioners in the continent (Rowe, 2019). In a January 2015 poll, 87 percent of Indonesians indicated that they favoured the death penalty for drug traffickers and praised the President's firm position in maintaining Indonesian residents' popular values that only the death sentence deters drug traffickers and dealers from functioning in Indonesia (Santoso, 2016). Severe crime measures are motivated in some ways by election cycles, which are frequently utilised by politicians to demonstrate their authority in the preservation of national sovereignty, which is perceived positively by voters (Lindsey & Nicholson, 2016).

For drug dealers, the narcotics trade is structured as hierarchical and pyramidal, with the amount of labour participating at each phase of the transaction decreasing as the drugs' proximity to the destination countries increases (Thoumi, 2003). Profit allocation within the trade likewise grows in accordance with the distance of the trafficker to the consumer. This suggests that roughly 80% of earnings are achieved at the ends of the trafficking chain (Bagley & Tokatlian, 1992). As stated in the previous subsection, the rate of methamphetamine in Indonesia is estimated at Rp. 1.500.000 (\$100) per gram. Yuhernawa & Barthos (2021) disclosed that smugglers would generally earn between Rp. 220.000.000 (\$15.000) to Rp. 300.000.000 (\$20.000) for each delivery of a kilogram of the drug. This is a substantial sum of money for an Indonesian, given that 47,8 percent of the population earns less than Rp. 1.200.000 (~\$80) per month (Aji, 2015).

## DISCUSSION

The interdiction strategy of sweeping the fast Indonesian border is practical, but on a broad scale, it is improbable, especially considering the dispersed nature of the rat trail. In her research, Elyta (2020) admitted that sweeping the jungle proved effective in densely inhabited regions; however, the border itself is just too massive to adequately police. Furthermore, when interception attempts in one region rise. Paoli, Greenfield, and Reuter (2009) believe that trafficking simply shifts to another region, a phenomenon known as the "Balloon Effect". The notion that trafficker may just relocate their route to a location where there is less pressure means that the supply of drugs for the market is not affected, and so interdiction measures from the supply perspective are rendered ineffective. Nevertheless, this does not mean to cease all interdiction operations, as completely abandoning enforcement means granting the trafficker an unobstructed path to the market without fear. Displacement still could have a substantial benefit by forcing traffickers to invest considerable resources in relocating and establishing alternative links and networks, routes and modes of operation (Windle & Farrell, 2012).

In theory, drug use and sales would cease to exist if strong laws were able to deter their use and sale. Despite the fact that the continuous arrest of drug dealers and users is extremely popular among the Indonesian public, and the INP receives plaudits from political elites (Tribrata News, 2021), few can agree on the effectiveness of the crackdowns based on the analysis of data above. Jenner (2011) stated that suppressing the drug trade in order to reduce supply disregard the most fundamental of market factors, supply and demand elasticity. When the supply of goods is lowered without correspondingly decreasing demand, the price of that item increases. This may result in reduced sales of a variety of products, but not for drugs, as the drug industry is not price sensitive. Drug demand, particularly for highly addicted substances like methamphetamine, is relatively inelastic. Individuals that purchase these substances will continue to do so regardless of how expensive they get (Mankiw, 2008). According to the data in the findings, despite the fact that Southeast Asian law enforcement increased the number of drug arrests from 2011 to 2019, as shown in Diagram 1, the price of illicit drugs on the domestic market has continued to fall, as shown in Diagram 2. This indicates that the enforcement has not resulted in a shortage of illegal drugs, which are still readily available on the domestic market and are becoming cheaper and more accessible.

In accordance with the policy of classifying drug abusers as offenders, Asmin (2019) revealed that it made the INP prioritise the drug amount over substance dependence; The criminalisation of drug offenders also neglected their health requirements. By ignoring the treatment for drug users, the nation contributes to the perpetuation of the drug problem. Drug addiction adds to socioeconomic issues such as criminality, homelessness, domestic violence, occupational hazards, and escalating healthcare expenses (Neill, 2014).

Whether or not the death penalty is justified from a justice and human rights perspective is up for another debate. However, if the purpose of capital punishment is to deter traffickers and give a strong warning for drug crimes, then the efficacy is once again needed to be reassessed. As mentioned in the analysis section, drug trafficking interdiction in Indonesia is a sort of contradiction. Massive arrest efforts were attempted, and Indonesian drug laws are among the strictest in Southeast Asia, yet the use of illegal drugs continues to climb in the country (Kadarudin, Thamrin, & Liao, 2021). Paoli, Greenfield, and Reuter (2009) once again revealed why even the strictest law is ineffective at deterring criminals through the use of another phenomenon known as the “Hydra Effect”. The profit received from trafficking makes this trade an attractive operation for criminals. As long as there is a demand for drugs and the profit is sufficient to entice new traffickers to replace those who are caught, the drug market will continue to prosper (Paoli, 2002).

The consistent and high rate of profit from drug trafficking, along with its resistance to suppression efforts, creates a deep reservoir of people who make up the labour and management force that perpetuates the illegal industry in contravention of all efforts to control it. The Hydra Effects allow drug trafficking syndicate to absorb losses of personnel due to arrest, incarceration, or physical harm, at any place in the network (Paoli, Greenfield, & Reuter, 2009). The lucrative incentive associated with the illicit trade, together with its resiliency to suppression operations, produces a large pool of people willing to sustain the drug industry in defiance of all attempts to curtail it. The Hydra Effect facilitates drug trafficking networks to tolerate labour losses caused by seizure, imprisonment, or physical harm anywhere in the network (Kan, 2016).

Based on the findings of this study, which had the same effect on other countries, it is revealed that various countries throughout the world agree that people find it difficult to quit narcotics on which they have grown dependent or addicted. As such, they have tried moving forwards with another method, harm reduction. Harm reduction prioritises treatments and stabilisation of addicted individuals by providing high-quality prescribed alternatives and commencing with social reintegration of the marginalised drug user. However, critics of harm reduction argue that it is unsuitable for developing countries with limited resources and a large population, such as Indonesia. However, it is still debatable whether the technique would work in conflict-ridden governments or corrupt systems (Buxton, 2006). An even more radical approach, decriminalisation and legalisation, have been proposed with the intention to eradicate the nature of the illicit market entirely. Nevertheless, the primary criticism levelled towards legalisation is that it would boost demand for narcotics, thereby escalating the problem of drug usage. To make legalisation work, a regulatory framework must be established, and for the time being, there are more questions than answers on the implementation of this idea (Jenner, 2011).

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have concluded that interdiction and a tough drug law policy would once again be classified as dismal results. As a destination country for drug trafficking, Indonesia's efforts to suppress the drug industry's supply and demand framework have not yielded the envisioned result of completely eradicating the network. The attempts to curtail supply by cracking down on international shipments and discouraging demand for drug use and trafficking by enacting stringent laws have largely been met with the balloon and hydra effects. The balloon effect on the supply side simply caused traffickers to reroute their routes to areas with less pressure, whereas the hydra effect for demand always entices new traffickers to replace those who are apprehended or even executed. Not only did the drug war fail to fulfil its stated objective, but it also ignored the health requirements of addicted users, preferring to imprison them as a deterrent for others rather than seeking to rehabilitate them.

By referring to this paper, Indonesia will be one of the many example countries where future writers analyse on the drug war policy's implementation. Ultimately, though, interdiction and a-tough-on drugs policy have become fundamental principles of drug trafficking enforcement. The established concept indicates that any policy that is accommodative of narcotics will be viewed as a weak and careless response toward danger to national security. This suggests that policymakers have few options to consider; hence, even in the midst of a failing war on drugs conducted by other nations, leaders would continue to embrace it, refusing to learn from unsuccessful initiatives. However, an interesting mentioned in this paper is that in Indonesia, despite the ineffectiveness of arrests and the harsh laws, the public and political elites still fully back the policy. Possibly, the policy's ineffectiveness may not be the primary concern, and the policy may just act as a catalyst for political support and a means of keeping the public content. Future studies can be built on this assumption for all of the government's draconian policies, not only in the realm of drugs but across the spectrum of crime.

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