THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC PROTESTS AND DEMONSTRATIONS ON INDONESIA'S GOVERNANCE SYSTEM: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of public protests and demonstrations on the governance system in Indonesia within the context of post-Reformation electoral democracy. Through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 25 reputable journal articles published between 2023-2025, this research identifies patterns, mechanisms, and outcomes of collective action on political stability, policy responsiveness, institutional legitimacy, and regulatory frameworks. The synthesis results reveal multidimensional and contextual impacts. Qualitative findings underscore that protest effectiveness highly depends on political opportunity structures, digital media utilization, and civil society coalition capacity. Protests function as vital extra-institutional correction mechanisms, yet they also potentially cause polarization and short-term erosion of trust when government responses are repressive. This study concludes that protests have become an inseparable governance sub-system in Indonesia, driving adaptation and accountability pressures, albeit with complex consequences for social cohesion and democratic procedural stability. The findings offer theoretical contributions to social movement literature and practical insights for policymakers in designing constructive responses to public protests.

Keywords: Accountability, Democracy, Governance, Public Policy, Social Movement

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has undergone a profound political transformation since the fall of the New Order regime in 1998. The Reformasi era, initiated by the student movement, not only ended 32 years of authoritarian rule but also opened up far broader civil liberties, including the long-suppressed rights to assemble and express opinions (Aspinall, 2023; Mietzner, 2024). These freedoms have facilitated the emergence of public protests and demonstrations as effective instruments for interest articulation and social control, enabling citizens to openly voice dissatisfaction with government policies perceived as detrimental (Tornquist, 2024; Warburton & Aspinall, 2023). This phenomenon of collective action has become a permanent feature of Indonesia's contemporary political landscape, ranging from large-scale student rallies to local community mobilizations around specific issues such as land disputes or environmental pollution (Davidson J & Henley D, 2024; Klinken, 2023). The persistent presence of protests indicates that political participation in Indonesia is no longer limited to five-yearly electoral mechanisms but unfolds dynamically in the daily relationship between the state and citizens.

The role of protests in Indonesian politics cannot be underestimated. Various studies show that protests have functioned as a driving force behind significant policy changes, the removal of public officials, and even pressure leading to fundamental policy shifts (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2023; Power T & Warburton E, 2025). In the last two decades, Indonesia has witnessed how waves of protests have been able to cancel or force revisions of controversial laws such as the KPK Law, the Omnibus Law on Job Creation, and the Criminal Code Bill, each involving cross-sectoral and cross-regional mass mobilization (Mietzner, 2024; Tan, 2023). At the local level, protests have also proven effective in halting environmentally damaging mining projects, encouraging regional budget transparency, and triggering the impeachment of regional heads involved in corruption (Junaedi & Saputra, 2024; Wicaksono & Adinda, 2025). In this context, a comprehensive understanding of how protests influence the governance system is crucial for academics, policymakers, and civil society actors. Governance in this study is understood as the entire process of interaction between formal institutions and non-state actors in regulating public affairs (Pierre & Peters, 2024, p. 18; see also Bevir, 2023). This approach shifts the focus from the state as the sole actor to an understanding of complex networks involving the state, market, and civil society (Rhodes, 2023; Stoker, 2023). Within this framework, public protest emerges as a form of non-institutional political participation that can influence governance

processes through the creation of public pressure, alteration of policy agendas, and demands for accountability (Bachtiger et al., 2023; Porta, 2024). The concept of "accountability from below" developed by Porta, (2024) explains how protests create accountability mechanisms originating from civil society pressure, especially when formal channels such as political parties or parliaments are deemed to have failed in their functions. Thus, the study of protest impacts on governance becomes an entry point for understanding deeper democratic dynamics. Social movement theory, particularly the political process approach, offers an analytical lens for understanding how protests create impact (McAdam et al., 2024). The concept of political opportunity structure (POS) explains how the political context including institutional access openness, elite stability, and the presence of allies shapes opportunities and obstacles for movement success (Tarrow, 2023). In Indonesia, the political opportunity structure has evolved dynamically: the early Reformasi period was characterized by high openness, but subsequently, a trend of oligarchic consolidation emerged, altering the opportunity landscape for protest movements (Aspinall, 2023). Variation in these opportunity structures also occurs across regions due to decentralization, creating different local elite configurations that open or close opportunities for protests at the local level (Buehler, 2023; Junaedi & Saputra, 2024).

Post-1998 Indonesia has built relatively stable electoral democratic institutions, yet faces serious challenges in the form of strengthening oligarchy, systemic corruption, and state capacity gaps (Warburton & Aspinall, 2023; Winters, 2023). Elections often serve more as arenas for inter-elite competition with significant financial capital than as mechanisms for articulating the interests of ordinary citizens (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2023). These conditions create space for protests as extra-institutional correction mechanisms, where citizens who feel unrepresented use street actions to voice their demands. Decentralization since 2001 has also created new political arenas at the regional level that frequently become loci of conflict and protests related to natural resources and local policies (Buehler, 2023; Davidson J & Henley D, 2024). The capacity and political will of regional officials to respond to protests vary greatly, reflected in the heterogeneity of protest impacts across different regions of Indonesia (Junaedi & Saputra, 2024; Permana & Siregar, 2023).

Indonesian civil society is one of the most vibrant in Southeast Asia, encompassing a broad spectrum of organizations ranging from professional urban advocacy NGOs, mass religious organizations with millions of members, sectoral trade unions, peasant and fisher movements, to indigenous communities and arts-cultural groups (Hikam, 2023; Uhlin, 2023). These actors play important roles in mobilizing protests, translating street demands into policy language negotiable with the government, and building bridges between social movements and formal institutions such as parliaments and courts (Marbun et al., 2023; Sari & Gunawan, 2023). However, Indonesian civil society also faces challenges of internal fragmentation, competition among organizations for resources and recognition, and vulnerability to co-optation by elite political interests (Aspinall, 2023; Warburton, 2024). In certain situations, political actors may even mobilize "aspirational" protests funded and directed for electoral interests or to weaken political opponents, blurring the boundary between authentic social movements and elite politics (Darmawan & Ningrum, 2025; Khalid & Aisyah, 2024; Yasih & Rakhmani, 2025).

This complexity makes the impact of protests on governance in Indonesia non-linear and highly dependent on the dynamic interaction between movement actors, state response, opportunity structures, and the specific context of the issue and region. Although there are many case studies on specific protests in Indonesia, there is a gap in the literature regarding systematic synthesis of their impact on the governance system. Existing studies tend to be isolated and focus on single cases (Mietzner, 2024; Power T & Warburton E, 2025). Therefore, this study aims to consolidate recent empirical findings (2023-2025) to answer the question: How do public protests and demonstrations influence political stability, policy responsiveness, institutional legitimacy, and regulatory frameworks within Indonesia's governance system? This study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the social movement and governance literature, as well as practical implications for designing constructive policy responses.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Governance and Public Protest in Theoretical Perspective

Modern governance is no longer viewed as the exclusive domain of the state operating hierarchically, but rather as an interactive process involving various stakeholders (Rhodes, 2023). This paradigm shift from government to governance recognizes that public policymaking often occurs through complex networks that transcend the boundaries of formal institutions, involving private actors, civil society organizations, and even protest social movements (Bevir, 2023). In this framework, public protest is understood as a form of non-institutional political participation that can influence governance processes through the creation of public pressure, alteration of elite preferences, and reframing of policy issues (Pierre & Peters, 2024). The concept of "accountability from below"

developed by Porta (2024) explains how protests create accountability mechanisms originating from civil society pressure, especially when formal channels such as political parties, parliaments, or oversight institutions are deemed to have failed or been co-opted by elite interests. In Indonesia, this concept is relevant given that various studies show political parties and representative institutions are often more responsive to oligarchic interests than to their constituents (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2023; Winters, 2023). Furthermore, the relationship between protest and governance can be understood through the lens of responsive governance, namely the ability of the governance system to detect, process, and respond to societal aspirations and demands (Bachtiger et al., 2023). In this perspective, protest is not a threat to stability that must be suppressed, but rather a feedback signal about the mismatch between state policy and community needs that requires an appropriate institutional response (Stoker, 2023). The level of responsiveness can vary from merely symbolic dialogue without concrete action, to substantive policy change and fundamental institutional reform (Tan, 2023). Research on Indonesia shows that this variation in responsiveness is influenced by factors such as state capacity, international pressure, media mobilization, and the presence of policy champions within the bureaucracy or parliament (Buehler, 2023; Mietzner, 2024; Warburton, 2024).

An important implication of the governance framework for the study of protest is the recognition that the impact of protests is not always direct and immediate, but can work through indirect pathways and over longer time frames (Porta, 2024). Protests can influence governance by altering public discourse and reframing certain issues so they become priority concerns, influencing voter preferences and electoral behavior which in turn changes the composition of the political elite, or creating new legal precedents and norms that guide the behavior of government actors in the future (McAdam et al., 2024). In Indonesia, for example, the 1998 student protests did not immediately produce a consolidated democracy, but opened up political space that was subsequently utilized by various actors to push for a series of institutional reforms over the following two decades (Aspinall, 2023; Yasih & Rakhmani, 2025). Understanding these indirect impact pathways is important to avoid simplistic conclusions that protests which do not immediately produce policy change have "failed," as they may be working through other mechanisms whose effects are only felt in the long term.

Social Movement Theory and its Relevance to the Indonesian Context

Three main theoretical approaches are used in the literature to analyze social movements and protests, each offering different yet complementary lenses. First, political process theory developed by McAdam et al., (2024) emphasizes the importance of political opportunity structure in determining the likelihood of social movement emergence and its effectiveness in creating impact. This structure encompasses dimensions such as the degree of access openness to political institutions, stability or divisions among ruling elites, the presence of influential allies within the system, and the state's capacity for repression (Tarrow, 2023). In Indonesia, the political opportunity structure has evolved dynamically post-Reformasi: the early period was characterized by high openness and elite fragmentation that allowed various movements to grow, but in subsequent developments, a trend of oligarchic consolidation and narrowing of civic space emerged, altering the opportunity landscape for protest movements (Aspinall, 2023; Tornquist, 2024). Variation in these opportunity structures also occurs across regions, where regional autonomy creates different local elite configurations and thus opens or closes opportunities for protests at the local level (Buehler, 2023; Junaedi & Saputra, 2024).

Second, resource mobilization theory Edwards & McCarthy, (2024) shifts focus from structural conditions to the internal capacity of movements, emphasizing the importance of organizational, financial, and cultural resources that can be mobilized by movement actors to achieve their goals. These resources include not only material assets such as funds and infrastructure, but also non-material resources such as legal expertise, social networks, moral legitimacy, and the ability to produce compelling narratives (Jenkins, 2023). In the Indonesian context, the diversity of civil society organizations from professional urban NGOs, mass religious organizations like NU and Muhammadiyah, sectoral trade unions, to community-based indigenous movements creates a complex resource landscape (Hikam, 2023; Uhlin, 2023). The ability to build cross-sectoral coalitions that combine these various resources becomes a key factor in protest success, as seen in the movement against the Omnibus Law on Job Creation, which successfully united trade unions, environmental organizations, student groups, and indigenous communities in one front (Hartanto & Dewi, 2025; Haryanto & Pratama, 2023). Conversely, fragmentation and failure to build coalitions often weaken the impact of protests, especially when the issue is narrowly sectoral or when movement elites fail to bridge interest differences among groups (Aspinall, 2023; Yasih & Rakhmani, 2025).

Third, in the contemporary digital era, the connective action framework developed by Bennett & Segerberg, (2023) offers a new perspective on how social media changes the logic of protest mobilization. Unlike traditional collective action that requires formal organization and centralized resources, connective action operates through loose networks coordinated digitally, where participation is personalized and messages are disseminated through individuals' social networks (Lim, 2023). In Indonesia, platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have become important arenas for protest mobilization, enabling local issues to quickly reach national and even international audiences, as well as facilitating action coordination without the presence of formal organizations (Firmansyah & Putra, 2025; Setyawan & Nurhayati, 2025). However, this connective action logic also brings its own challenges, such as tendencies toward narrative fragmentation, difficulty in maintaining demand consistency, and vulnerability to polarization and disinformation that can actually weaken movement cohesion (Ramadhani I & Siregar T, 2024; Rendra Q & Melati S, 2025). The integration of these three theoretical approaches enables a holistic analysis of how protests in Indonesia combining conventional and digital mobilization, utilizing changing opportunity structures, and managing diverse resources interact with and transform government institutions.

The Specific Indonesian Context: Electoral Democracy, Decentralization, and Civil Society

Post-1998 Indonesia has built relatively stable electoral democratic institutions, characterized by regular direct elections for president, legislative members, and regional heads, as well as reasonably guaranteed press and organizational freedom (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2023; Tan, 2023). However, democratic consolidation faces serious challenges in the form of strengthening oligarchic influence in electoral politics, systemic corruption practices at various levels of government, and gaps in state capacity to provide quality public services (Warburton & Aspinall, 2023; Winters, 2023). Critical studies show that elections in Indonesia are often more arenas for inter-elite competition with significant financial capital than mechanisms for articulating the interests of ordinary citizens, thus producing skewed representation and policies that favor capital owners more than the wider community (Buehler, 2023; Mietzner, 2024; Power T & Warburton E, 2025). These conditions create space for protests as extra-institutional correction mechanisms, where citizens who feel unrepresented through formal channels use street actions to voice their demands.

Massive political and fiscal decentralization implemented since 2001 has fundamentally changed Indonesia's governance architecture, creating more than 500 regional governments with considerable authority in managing resources and making local policies (Buehler, 2023; Davidson J & Henley D, 2024). This policy was intended to bring public services closer and increase government responsiveness to local needs, but in practice it has also created new political arenas at the regional level that often become loci of conflict and protests (Klinken, 2023). Protests related to natural resources such as mining, palm oil, or forestry often emerge in regions because licensing authority lies with district/city governments, while environmental and social impacts are borne by local communities (Rudiyansah, 2025; Wicaksono & Adinda, 2025). Similarly, direct local elections (Pilkada) initiated in 2005 have created intense political contestation at the regional level that sometimes triggers protests related to fraud, money politics, or dissatisfaction with incumbent performance (Kurniawan & Harsono, 2025). The variation in capacity and political will of regional officials to respond to protests is very high, reflected in the heterogeneity of protest impacts across different regions of Indonesia (Junaedi & Saputra, 2024; Permana & Siregar, 2023).

Indonesian civil society is one of the most vibrant and differentiated in Southeast Asia, encompassing a broad spectrum of organizations from professional urban advocacy NGOs, mass religious organizations with millions of members, sectoral trade unions, peasant and fisher movements, to indigenous communities and arts-cultural groups (Hikam, 2023; Uhlin, 2023). These actors play important roles in mobilizing protests, translating street demands into policy language negotiable with the government, and building bridges between social movements and formal institutions such as parliaments and courts (Marbun et al., 2023; Sari & Gunawan, 2023). However, Indonesian civil society also faces challenges of internal fragmentation, competition among organizations for resources and recognition, and vulnerability to co-optation by elite political interests (Aspinall, 2023; Warburton, 2024). In certain situations, political actors may even mobilize "aspirational" protests funded and directed for electoral interests or to weaken political opponents, blurring the boundary between authentic social movements and elite politics (Darmawan & Ningrum, 2025; Khalid & Aisyah, 2024; Yasih & Rakhmani, 2025). This complexity makes the impact of protests on governance in Indonesia non-linear and highly dependent on the dynamic interaction between movement actors, state response, opportunity structures, and the specific context of the issue and region.

METHOD

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design following the PRISMA 2025 guidelines (Page et al., 2025). SLR enables rigorous identification, evaluation, and synthesis of empirical evidence (Grant & Booth, 2023). Literature searches were conducted in April 2025 across Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and SINTA (Indonesian national journal portal). Keywords combined terms for protest ("public protest*", "social movement*"), impact ("impact", "effect*"), governance ("governance", "policy change", "legitimacy"), and "Indonesia", limited to 2023-2025. Inclusion criteria: (1) post-Reformasi Indonesia context; (2) protests as primary independent variable; (3) reported impacts on governance outcomes (policy, stability, legitimacy, regulation); (4) original peer-reviewed empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods) indexed in Scopus or SINTA 1-2. Exclusion criteria: studies without impact analysis, focusing on spontaneous violence, or low methodological quality.

Two researchers independently screened titles/abstracts, then full texts. Disagreements resolved through discussion. Data extraction covered study characteristics, protest features, governance outcomes, and limitations. Quality appraisal used the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) version 2024 (Hong et al., 2024); no studies were excluded based on MMAT scores. Thematic synthesis followed Braun & Clarke, (2023) approach.
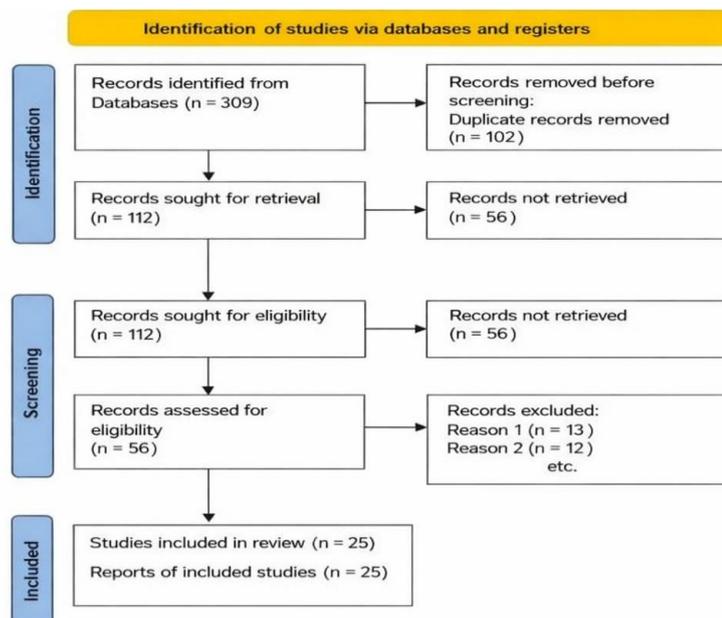

Figure 1 PRISMA 2025 Flow Diagram

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Included Studies

The selection process following the PRISMA flow diagram yielded 25 articles meeting all inclusion criteria for synthesis in this review. From a total of 309 articles initially identified through database searches, after removing 102 duplicate records and screening 207 titles and abstracts, 112 articles were sought for full-text retrieval. Of these, 56 articles could not be accessed or obtained due to subscription restrictions or unavailability, leaving 56 articles for full-text eligibility assessment. At this stage, 31 articles were excluded for various reasons: 13 articles because they did not adequately analyze protest impacts on governance outcomes, instead focusing primarily on protest dynamics or internal movement characteristics; 12 articles because they focused on spontaneous riots or violence without identifiable political demands or clear protest organization; and 6 articles due to low methodological quality or not meeting study design criteria after MMAT assessment. Ultimately, 25 articles were deemed eligible and included in the final thematic synthesis. The 25 included studies demonstrate considerable diversity in their methodological approaches, reflecting the multidimensional nature of protest research. Quantitative studies (11 articles, 44%) employed various techniques including regression analysis, structural equation modeling, panel data analysis, and survey experiments to establish causal relationships between protest characteristics and governance outcomes. Qualitative studies (10 articles, 40%) utilized case study methods, in-depth interviews, ethnographic observation, and discourse analysis to provide rich contextual understanding of protest dynamics and their consequences. Mixed-methods studies (4 articles, 16%) integrated quantitative and qualitative approaches, combining for example network

analysis of social media activism with interviews of key activists to understand both the structure and meaning of protest mobilization. This methodological diversity strengthens the synthesis by enabling triangulation of findings across different research traditions and epistemologies. The temporal and topical distribution of included studies reflects both the evolution of Indonesian protest politics and scholarly attention to different issues. Publication years are evenly distributed with 9 studies (36%) from 2023, 8 studies (32%) from 2024, and 8 studies (32%) from 2025, indicating that this review captures the most current research while maintaining sufficient breadth. In terms of protest issues, environmental and agrarian protests constitute the largest category (8 studies, 32%), reflecting the intensification of natural resource conflicts in Indonesia's decentralized era. Corruption and accountability protests follow closely (7 studies, 28%), indicating sustained public concern with governance quality. National law and policy protests (6 studies, 24%) include movements against major legislation such as the Omnibus Law on Job Creation and the Criminal Code Bill. Human rights and identity politics protests (4 studies, 16%), while fewer in number, address some of the most contentious and polarizing issues in Indonesian society. The predominance of national-level analysis (18 studies, 72%) over regional/local analysis (7 studies, 28%) suggests a research gap that future studies should address, given the importance of decentralization in contemporary Indonesian governance.

Table 1. Characteristics of the 25 Included Studies

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Publication Year	2023	9	36
	2024	8	32
	2025	8	32
Methodological Design	Quantitative	11	44
	Qualitative	10	40
	Mixed-Methods	4	16
Main Protest Issue	Environment/Agrarian	8	32
	Corruption & Accountability	7	28
	National Laws/Policies	6	24
	Human Rights & Identity Politics	4	16
Level of Analysis	National	18	72
	Regional/Local	7	28
Main Governance Outcome	Policy Change/Response	18	72
	Public Legitimacy/Trust	12	48
	Political Stability/Change	9	36
	Regulatory/Institutional Change	6	24

Protests as Drivers of Policy Change and Responsiveness

A substantial majority of the reviewed studies 18 out of 25, or 72% confirm that protests successfully trigger various forms of policy responses from the Indonesian government. These responses range from initial dialogue and public consultation, through postponement of policy implementation, to partial revisions and, in some cases, complete revocation of protested policies (Haryanto & Pratama, 2023; Setyawan & Nurhayati, 2025). This finding robustly confirms that in contemporary Indonesia, protests have become an effective instrument for civil society to influence public policy processes, particularly when formal channels such as political parties and representative institutions are perceived as unresponsive or captured by elite interests (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2023). Haryanto & Pratama, (2023) detailed case study of the labor movement against the Omnibus Law on Job Creation documented how sustained mass mobilization, strategically combined with legal advocacy through judicial review petitions and international pressure through solidarity campaigns, successfully forced the government to make significant revisions to the employment cluster in the omnibus law. Similarly, Setyawan & Nurhayati, (2025) quantitative analysis of digital petitions showed that well-organized online protests can create sufficient public pressure to reverse already established policies, with effectiveness increasing when issues gain mass media attention and support from influential public figures (Yasih & Rakhmani, 2025).

The literature identifies three main mechanisms through which protests create policy impact. First, protests generate a legitimacy crisis by portraying a policy or public official as illegitimate, unconstitutional, or contrary to public interest, forcing policymakers to undertake corrective responses to restore image and trust (Ramadhani I & Siregar T, 2024; Sinaga & Wijaya, 2025). This mechanism operates through what Sinaga & Wijaya, (2025) term "legitimacy signaling," where the scale and intensity of protest send clear signals about societal discontent that political elites cannot ignore without risking their own legitimacy. Second, protesters strategically widen the conflict arena from one institutional setting to another for example, from the bureaucratic-administrative arena to the media, courts, or parliament thereby increasing pressure points and multiplying opportunities for success (Marbun et al., 2023). (Marbun et al., 2023) study of legal mobilization following Papuan protests demonstrated how human rights activists successfully moved the issue of human rights violations in Papua from the streets to international judicial bodies and UN mechanisms, creating diplomatic pressure that forced more serious government response (Rudiyansah, 2025). Third, effective mobilization of symbols and narratives enables protest movements to frame their demands in ways that resonate with broad publics, using religious symbols, constitutional rights claims, or environmental justice frames that transcend the core activist group (Hartanto & Dewi, 2025; Permana & Siregar, 2023).

However, the synthesis also reveals that protest effectiveness in driving policy change is highly contingent on contextual factors. Studies consistently show that protests focusing on environmental and agrarian issues, and those occurring at the regional or local level, tend to be more effective in producing concrete policy changes compared to protests addressing abstract national policy issues (Junaedi & Saputra, 2024; Wicaksono & Adinda, 2025). This pattern is explained by several factors: the proximity of environmental and agrarian issues to constituents' daily lives and livelihoods, the existence of tangible and documented evidence of harm (such as polluted water sources or illegally occupied land), and more direct access to policymakers at the local level who can be held accountable through face-to-face interactions (Tanaya & Utomo, 2024). Additionally, the presence of allies within the governance system sympathetic parliament members, reformist bureaucratic officials, or state institutions like the Ombudsman and National Human Rights Commission proves crucial in mediating between protest pressure and policy change (Marbun et al., 2023; Nugraha & Aziz, 2024). These findings strongly align with political process theory's emphasis on political opportunity structures, particularly the presence of influential allies, in determining social movement success (McAdam et al., 2024; Tarrow, 2023). Conversely, when allies are absent or when political elites unite against protest demands, even large mobilizations may fail to produce significant policy change, as documented in several national protest cases where governments responded with symbolic accommodation without substantive reform (Sinaga & Wijaya, 2025; Yasih & Rakhmani, 2025).

The Dualistic Impact of Protests on Political Stability

Findings regarding the impact of protests on Indonesia's political stability reveal a complex and often paradoxical pattern that defies simple characterization. Sinaga & Wijaya, (2025), in their sophisticated quantitative study employing structural equation modeling with time-series data, found a consistent trade-off pattern across multiple protest events: protests significantly increase the probability of policy concessions from the government that contribute to medium-term political stabilization, yet simultaneously generate short-term political instability indicators such as stock market volatility, heightened tensions within government-supporting party coalitions, and

public discourse about official resignations. This dualistic finding demonstrates that protests perform twin functions in democratic systems: they act as safety valves channeling societal dissatisfaction and preventing the accumulation of frustration that might otherwise erupt in more destructive forms, while simultaneously serving as stress tests that challenge institutional resilience and elite capacity for conflict management (Porta, 2024; Tilly, 2023). In the Indonesian context, short-term destabilizing effects manifest through rupiah exchange rate fluctuations during major protest waves, delays in foreign investment decisions, and sudden changes in government legislative priorities (Lestari & Wahyudi, 2023; Tanaya & Utomo, 2024).

The capacity of protests to directly trigger official turnover emerges as a particularly significant finding, especially at the regional level where accountability mechanisms may be more direct. Wicaksono & Adinda, (2025) longitudinal study of environmental protests in Kalimantan documented how consistent community mobilization against environmentally destructive coal mining operations succeeded in pushing Regional Houses of Representatives (DPRD) to exercise inquiry rights that ultimately led to the dismissal of regents and heads of environmental agencies. This finding illustrates how protests can translate public pressure into institutional action when representative bodies retain some functional independence and responsiveness. Similarly, Kurniawan & Harsono, (2025) methodologically rigorous study using regression discontinuity design found that anti-incumbent protests occurring in the months immediately preceding regional head elections significantly reduced incumbent electability and increased the probability of their defeat in Pilkada (direct local elections). These findings indicate that protests not only influence immediate policy outcomes but also directly affect the stability of elite political careers and the composition of government, which in turn shapes policy directions for years to come. However, protest effectiveness in creating official turnover depends critically on the presence of institutions capable of processing these demands constitutionally functional DPRDs with genuine oversight authority, political parties responsive to constituency pressures, and independent judiciary institutions willing to rule against powerful interests (Buehler, 2023; Halim & Yulianto, 2023; Marbun et al., 2023).

From the perspective of deliberative democratic theory, the short-term instability generated by protests can be understood as a necessary price for achieving more democratic long-term policy corrections (Bachtiger et al., 2023). This perspective suggests that democratic systems must tolerate some measure of disruption to remain responsive to evolving societal preferences. However, several studies sound important warnings about the limits of this tolerance. Darmawan & Ningrum, (2025) analysis of "silent majority" counter-mobilization shows that prolonged or highly disruptive protests perceived as threatening public order can trigger conservative reactions that actually support policies restricting civic space and civil liberties. Rendra Q & Melati S, (2025) study of the "boomerang effect" demonstrates how state repression of protests, rather than restoring stability, can escalate conflict by radicalizing moderate protesters and attracting new participants who previously remained on the sidelines. These findings underscore the importance of nuanced understanding: the relationship between protest and stability is not linear but curvilinear, with moderate levels of protest potentially enhancing democratic responsiveness while excessive or poorly managed protest or poorly managed state response can undermine the very institutional foundations on which democratic governance depends. The key implication is that political actors and civil society must carefully calibrate their strategies to maintain protest effectiveness while avoiding the tipping points that trigger authoritarian backlashes or institutional erosion.

Contingency of Protest Impact on Institutional Legitimacy

The impact of protests on institutional legitimacy understood as the level of public trust in government institutions, political parties, parliament, and democratic procedures emerges from this synthesis as highly dependent on the nature of state response. Analysis of the 12 studies examining legitimacy outcomes reveals a consistent and powerful pattern: repressive state responses are systematically associated with sharp and often lasting declines in public trust across multiple institutions. Nugraha & Aziz, (2024) detailed study of police reform pressures following demonstrator deaths documented how the use of excessive force by security forces in dispersing protests not only failed to restore public order but actually triggered wider waves of public anger and reduced trust in the Indonesian National Police (Polri) to its lowest recorded levels in a decade. This finding challenges simplistic law-and-order assumptions that equate repressive response with stability maintenance. Similarly, Rendra Q & Melati S, (2025) analysis of the "boomerang effect" in the context of the 2023 Islamic Defenders Action protests showed that government imposition of internet restrictions and criminal prosecution of activists, rather than demobilizing the movement, actually strengthened internal solidarity, shifted demand focus from specific issues to more fundamental claims about civil liberties and rule of law, and significantly eroded government legitimacy in both domestic and international public opinion. Rudiyansah, (2025) further highlights how repressive official actions against

demonstrations reveal a fundamental contradiction within constitutional democracy, where officials who should function as protectors of citizens' rights instead become instruments of coercion, thereby delegitimizing the very institutions they represent. The theoretical mechanism linking repressive response to legitimacy erosion can be understood through political trust theory as developed by Levi & Stoker, (2023). According to this framework, public trust in institutions rests on perceptions of institutional trustworthiness, encompassing three essential dimensions: technical competence in performing designated functions, demonstrated commitment to fair procedures and rules, and genuine concern for citizens' interests and welfare. Repressive responses particularly those involving human rights violations, disregard for due process, or systematic silencing of criticism send unmistakable signals that state institutions lack commitment to justice and do not prioritize citizens' interests, thereby fundamentally eroding the foundation of legitimacy (Meer & Hakhverdian, 2024). Ramadhani I & Siregar T, (2024) innovative survey experiment design provides compelling evidence for this mechanism: respondents exposed to news coverage depicting the DPR's defensive response to anti-corruption protests such as summoning KPK leaders for "clarification" rather than substantively responding to public demands showed significantly decreased trust scores for the DPR, even among respondents who previously had no prior information about the protests. This experimental finding suggests that institutional responses themselves communicate important information to citizens about institutional character, independent of the original protest issues.

Conversely, dialogical and accommodative state responses demonstrate capacity to restore or even enhance public perceptions of institutional responsiveness and legitimacy. Sari & Gunawan, (2023) participatory action research on women's protests pushing for Regional Regulations on Handling Sexual Violence documented how open dialogue processes between women activists and DPRD members, involving public hearings, joint field visits to affected communities, and collaborative drafting sessions, not only produced higher quality regulations but also significantly increased activists' trust in local government commitment to addressing gender-based violence. This finding illustrates the legitimacy-building potential of what scholars term "procedural justice" the idea that citizens are more likely to accept and trust institutional decisions when they perceive the decision-making process as fair, transparent, and inclusive (Tyler, 2023). Wicaksono & Adinda, (2025) comparative analysis of environmental protest responses in different Kalimantan districts provides additional evidence: districts where governments responded to protests by forming multi-stakeholder teams involving communities, companies, and academics, and by issuing transparent permits with public oversight mechanisms, actually experienced increased government approval ratings in subsequent local surveys, outperforming districts that responded with denial or repression. These findings carry profound implications for governance practice, suggesting that well-managed protest responses can serve as opportunities for legitimacy-building rather than merely as crises to be managed or threats to be suppressed.

Protests as Catalysts for Regulatory and Institutional Innovation

Beyond immediate policy changes and impacts on stability and legitimacy, several studies document how protests serve as catalysts for more fundamental changes in regulatory frameworks and institutional innovation in Indonesia. Sari & Gunawan, (2023) longitudinal study of women's movement activism against gender-based violence provides a compelling illustration of this catalytic function. The research documents how consistent mobilization by women's organizations, beginning with street demonstrations and evolving into systematic policy advocacy through multiple institutional channels, successfully pushed for the enactment of Regional Regulations on Handling Sexual Violence in several districts across Central Java and West Nusa Tenggara. Crucially, this process did not end with regulation passage but continued through implementation phases, resulting in the formation of Integrated Service Units at district levels that institutionalized cross-sectoral collaboration among health services, police, social services, and civil society organizations in handling violence cases. This example demonstrates how protest movements can generate institutional innovations that outlast the immediate protest cycle and create lasting changes in how the state addresses social problems.

Nugraha & Aziz, (2024) study of police reform following protest-related deaths documents another dimension of institutional innovation. Their research shows how intense public pressure and media scrutiny following multiple demonstrator deaths at the hands of security forces catalyzed a comprehensive review of police protocols for demonstration management. The result was issuance of new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) fundamentally reorienting police approach toward protest management, emphasizing human rights-respecting, de-escalation strategies. These SOPs mandated several innovations: compulsory human rights and negotiation technique training for all personnel assigned to demonstration security; categorical prohibition of firearm use in demonstration contexts; establishment of dedicated complaint mechanisms accessible to protesters; and creation of joint monitoring teams including civil society representatives. While the authors acknowledge significant implementation challenges

and continued inconsistencies in field practice, they emphasize that the existence of this new regulatory framework creates new norms and standards that civil society can leverage for future accountability claims. This finding illustrates how protest pressure can drive change not only at the substantive policy level but also at the procedural and institutional level governing state-citizen interactions, potentially reshaping the fundamental terms of engagement between state and society. At the village and local community level, agrarian protests and natural resource conflicts have proven particularly potent drivers of participatory innovation. Junaedi & Saputra, (2024) comparative study across three Indonesian districts with significant agrarian conflict histories documented how communities experiencing sustained protest mobilization subsequently adopted more inclusive and deliberative approaches to village development planning (Musrenbang). These innovations included systematic efforts to include previously marginalized groups women, youth, indigenous communities, and landless farmers in planning processes, adoption of tiered deliberation methods allowing issues to be discussed at multiple levels before final decisions, and creation of dedicated mechanisms for monitoring implementation of planning decisions. The authors interpret these innovations as direct responses to critiques that previous planning processes were elitist and systematically ignored the interests of communities most affected by development projects. This pattern aligns with Porta, (2024) theoretical argument that social movements contribute to "democratic learning" that diffuses participatory innovations from movement contexts into formal institutional settings. Yasih & Rakhmani, (2025) similarly observe that grassroots articulations of grievance, even when subsequently re-articulated by elite interests, can temporarily create coherent frameworks for understanding systemic problems that push for institutional responsiveness. Collectively, these findings suggest that protest movements, even when they do not achieve their immediate policy objectives, may generate longer-term institutional changes that enhance democratic quality and governance responsiveness.

Contingency Factors Influencing Protest Success

The thematic synthesis across all 25 studies enables identification of four interrelated clusters of factors that systematically strengthen or weaken protest impacts on Indonesian governance. The first and most frequently cited factor is political opportunity structure the configuration of political conditions external to movements that shape possibilities for influence. Studies consistently show that protests achieve greater effectiveness when occurring during periods of political opening such as approaching elections, when political elites become more sensitive to public opinion and more willing to offer concessions (Kurniawan & Harsono, 2025; Sinaga & Wijaya, 2025). Divisions among ruling elites similarly create opportunities for movements to exploit, as competing factions may seek to mobilize popular support against rivals (Marbun et al., 2023). The presence of institutional allies sympathetic legislators, reformist bureaucrats, or independent state institutions like the Ombudsman, National Human Rights Commission, or Corruption Eradication Commission provides crucial entry points for translating street pressure into institutional action (Nugraha & Aziz, 2024). Conversely, when elites maintain unity and the political system remains closed to external influence, even large and sustained mobilizations may fail to generate significant impact, as documented in several national-level protest cases (Darmawan & Ningrum, 2025; Khalid & Aisyah, 2024).

The second factor cluster concerns movement resources and strategic capacity. Studies emphasize that protest effectiveness depends critically on movements' ability to mobilize not just numbers but diverse resources including organizational infrastructure, coalition-building capacity, and narrative construction skills. The movement against the Omnibus Law on Job Creation exemplifies effective resource mobilization, successfully uniting trade unions, environmental organizations, student groups, farmers' associations, and indigenous communities in a broad coalition that could sustain pressure across multiple fronts (Hartanto & Dewi, 2025; Haryanto & Pratama, 2023). Such cross-sectoral coalitions prove more resilient and politically potent than single-issue mobilizations. Narrative capacity the ability to frame demands in ways that resonate beyond core activist constituencies similarly distinguishes more from less effective protests. Successful movements deploy culturally resonant symbols, whether drawn from religious traditions, constitutional rights discourse, or widely shared values of environmental justice (Febrianty & Chandra, 2024; Permana & Siregar, 2023). In the contemporary context, digital-era resources have become increasingly important: studies of online petition campaigns and social media activism demonstrate that effective integration of online mobilization with offline action significantly amplifies protest impact (Firmansyah & Putra, 2025; Setyawan & Nurhayati, 2025). The third factor, extensively discussed in previous themes, is quality of state response. The synthesis reveals a robust pattern: dialogical and accommodative responses tend to de-escalate conflict, open negotiation spaces, and can even enhance institutional legitimacy, while repressive responses tend to prolong conflict, escalate demands, and erode trust (Nugraha & Aziz, 2024; Rendra Q & Melati S, 2025; Rudiyansah, 2025). This finding carries important implications for governance practice, suggesting that how states respond to protest may matter as much as or more than the content of protest demands themselves. The fourth factor concerns

issue characteristics and context. Protests addressing issues with direct, tangible impacts on people's lives environmental pollution affecting health, land grabs threatening livelihoods, price hikes for basic commodities tend to mobilize broader and more sustained support than protests focused on abstract policy debates or complex systemic issues (Tanaya & Utomo, 2024; Wicaksono & Adinda, 2025). Similarly, local-level protests often achieve greater effectiveness than national mobilizations due to closer geographic and social proximity between protesters and decision-makers, and the existence of more direct accountability mechanisms at district and village levels (Junaedi & Saputra, 2024). These contingency factors interact in complex ways, suggesting that protest outcomes cannot be predicted from any single factor but emerge from configurations of multiple conditions.

Negative Impacts Requiring Attention

While the reviewed literature predominantly emphasizes positive democratic functions of protest, several studies document negative consequences that merit serious attention from scholars and practitioners. The first concerns short-term economic disruption, which can impose significant costs on vulnerable populations not directly involved in protest activities. Lestari & Wahyudi, (2023) time-series analysis of labor protest waves in Indonesian industrial zones found that prolonged and large-scale strikes significantly influenced foreign direct investment decisions, with measurable delays or cancellations of planned investments following major protest episodes. These investment effects, in turn, impact job creation and local economic growth, potentially harming the very working-class communities that labor protests ostensibly aim to benefit. Tanaya & Utomo, (2024) econometric analysis of anti-fuel subsidy protests similarly documented short-term market effects, including rupiah exchange rate volatility and stock market fluctuations, that create economic uncertainty with disproportionate impacts on lower-income households. While these effects are typically temporary, they illustrate how protest politics entails distributional consequences that extend beyond intended targets.

The second negative impact concerns social polarization, particularly acute when protests mobilize around identity-based cleavages. Khalid & Aisyah, (2024) analysis of Islamic mass organization protests in blasphemy cases demonstrates how identity-based mobilization, while effective in mobilizing large numbers, tends to deepen social divisions and leave lasting wounds that complicate future intergroup relations. Their longitudinal analysis shows that communities experiencing intense identity-based protest polarization subsequently show decreased intergroup trust, reduced willingness to engage in cross-group cooperation, and increased tendency to interpret political issues through identity lenses. (Darmawan & Ningrum, (2025) study of "silent majority" counter-mobilization reveals how prolonged identity-based protest can trigger reactive mobilization from other groups, creating escalating cycles of polarization that fragment civil society and undermine possibilities for deliberative democratic engagement. This polarization dynamic poses particular challenges for Indonesian democracy given the country's extraordinary ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity, suggesting that protest strategies must carefully consider potential impacts on social cohesion.

The third negative impact concerns long-term erosion of democratic trust, particularly when protest encounters repressive state response. Ramadhani I & Siregar T, (2024) panel study tracking trust levels before and after anti-corruption protests documented that trust declines following repressive responses tend to be persistent, remaining significantly below baseline even after the specific issues triggering protest have been resolved or faded from public attention. This persistence creates a dangerous dynamic: eroding trust makes citizens less willing to engage with formal political institutions, which in turn makes those institutions less representative and responsive, potentially triggering further protest cycles and further trust erosion (Levi & Stoker, 2023; Meer & Hakhverdian, 2024). In extreme scenarios, as several studies warn, this erosion can create openings for populist or authoritarian actors offering simple solutions to complex democratic challenges (Buehler, 2023; Porta, 2024; Warburton, 2024). These findings underscore that while protests serve essential democratic functions, they also carry risks requiring careful management by both state and civil society actors to ensure that democratic contestation strengthens rather than undermines democratic institutions.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review of 25 recent studies (2023-2025) yields four principal findings about protest impacts on Indonesian governance. First, protests effectively drive policy changes when movements leverage political opportunities, build broad coalitions, and craft resonant narratives with environmental, agrarian, and local protests proving most impactful. Second, protests generate a dualistic effect on stability: they produce medium-term policy concessions while creating short-term political and economic volatility. Third, protest impact on institutional legitimacy is contingent on state response quality repressive reactions erode trust, while dialogical engagement can

restore legitimacy. Fourth, protests catalyze deeper regulatory innovations and institutional reforms beyond immediate policy changes. The overarching conclusion is that protests have become an integral sub-system of Indonesia's democratic governance, functioning as vital correction mechanisms when formal channels falter. Crucially, protest outcomes depend not on movement characteristics alone but fundamentally on how institutions respond. For policymakers, this underscores the need for constructive response capacities and strengthened participatory channels. For civil society, integrating street protests with evidence-based advocacy enhances long-term impact. Ultimately, Indonesian democracy's health will be measured by its ability to productively absorb protest pressures while maintaining social cohesion. Limitations: The evidence base may reflect publication bias toward significant findings. Indonesia's heterogeneity limits simple generalization. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, cross-national comparisons, and focus on indirect protest effects.

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