

Civil society and street politics: contesting state legitimacy through demonstrations in emerging democracies

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Abstract

The wave of street demonstrations in Indonesia in recent years has highlighted tensions between the state and civil society, particularly when representative institutions are perceived as no longer capable of engaging in deliberative communication with citizens. This study aims to analyze street demonstrations as a political practice of civil society in response to the weakening of trust in formal democratic channels. This study focuses on a series of protests demanding the dissolution of the House of Representatives on August 25–31, 2025. This study used a phenomenological approach to analyze the symbolic and moral meanings emerging from the demonstrations. Data were collected through an analysis of media reports, civil society organization reports, official state documents, and social media content. The analytical process followed the Miles and Huberman model through data reduction, presentation, and conclusions. The findings indicate that when communication between the state and citizens is disrupted and public trust weakens, street politics emerges as a space to articulate criticism and ethical demands. The escalation of violence, differing narratives regarding the victims, and high public dissatisfaction with the handling of protests highlight the tension between electoral legitimacy and moral legitimacy. This study suggests that democratic legitimacy is dynamic and continuously negotiated through interactions between the state and civil society, as well as non-electoral participation in the public sphere.

Keywords: civil society, street politics, state legitimacy, public sphere, deliberative democracy

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Introduction

Demonstrations have become one of the most prominent political expressions in the contemporary democratic landscape (Dalton, 2022; Fishman, 2025; Marino et al., 2020). This phenomenon of mass mobilization is not only occurring in countries with established democratic traditions, but is also growing stronger in countries undergoing democratic consolidation. According to the Global Protest Tracker released by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2025), more than 147 large-scale protests against the government took place in the last twelve months, most of which occurred in the Global South. This data shows that public demonstrations are not merely sporadic incidents (Chiwarawara, 2025; Klandermans, 2012; Sabucedo et al., 2017), but have also become a common symptom that marks the intensification of tensions between the state and civil society (Kang, 2023; Klein & Regan, 2018), while also serving as an important indicator of the crisis of legitimacy faced by emerging democracies (Flesher Fominaya, 2017; Quaranta, 2016).

In developing democracies, public protests often emerge as a response to the deterioration of freedom of association, increased repression of civil society organizations, and the narrowing of political discourse (Kang, 2023; Klein & Regan, 2018). *The Democracy Report 2025 confirms that in the last decade, the frequency of protests in democratic countries has increased significantly* (Nord et al., 2025). This pro-democracy mobilization is often accompanied by an escalation of political violence, which shows how civil society is trying to maintain space for participation amid the government's tendency to restrict freedoms (Kadivar, 2018; Mietzner, 2021; Yehene & Ohayon, 2026). In other words, demonstrations have become a form of spontaneous expression of discontent and a serious political instrument for challenging the legitimacy of the state (Fabio Angiolillo, Ana Good God, Marina Nord, 2025; Kilby, 2024).

Indonesia provides a powerful illustration of these dynamics. As one of the largest democracies in Asia, post-Reformation Indonesia is known for its relatively open civil space. However, in recent years, this space has narrowed through regulations that limit freedom of expression, repression of community organizations, and criminalization of activists (Alnemr, 2025; Setiawan & Tomsa, 2023). It has encouraged civil society to channel its aspirations through street actions. Data from the Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence and the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation recorded at least 3,337 protesters arrested between August 25 and 31, 2025, in 20 cities. The handling of protests was often marked by the excessive use of force by the authorities, as reported by Amnesty International, which highlighted the dilemma between stability and the protection of citizens' democratic rights.

Theoretically, this phenomenon can be understood through the framework of the public sphere conceived by Jürgen Habermas. Habermas conceptualizes the public sphere as an arena of rational discourse where citizens can participate freely to shape public opinion and monitor the practices of state power (Habermas & Burger, 1991). In a healthy democratic system, formal institutions such as parliament become the main forum for this deliberation. However, when these institutions fail to function or even become part of the problem, civil society is compelled to create alternative public spheres. Street demonstrations transform into physical manifestations of a displaced public sphere, where debates and criticism of state policies can be voiced openly when formal channels are blocked (Fisher et al., 2019; Mendonça & Ercan, 2015).

This dynamic is enriched by the perspective of social movement theory, particularly through concepts developed by Charles Tilly. Tilly highlights three key elements: mobilization, repertoires of contention, and political opportunity structures (Tilly, 2014). Street demonstrations can be analyzed as a repertoire chosen by civil society, relying on collective mobilization and specific tactics such as marches, blockades, and political speeches. The existing political opportunity structure greatly influences the choice of this repertoire. The limitations and weaknesses of formal institutions provide opportunities for street politics to emerge as a faster and more impactful alternative means of expression. Its effectiveness depends on resources, networks, and emotional and ideological dimensions that can mobilize mass participation.

The culmination of the interaction between state repression and civil resistance is often manifested in a powerful symbolic event. The tragic death of Affan Kurniawan, an online motorcycle taxi driver who was run over by a tactical vehicle during a demonstration demanding the dissolution of the House of Representatives in August 2025, is a clear example of this dynamic. His death became a statistical record of victims

of violence and an event that was quickly constructed into a new symbol of civil resistance against the arbitrariness of state power (Beliakova & Timofeeva, 2025; Karn, 2023). Referring to Judith Butler (2016) theoretical framework on the politics of mourning, the public mourning process for the death of victims is an emotional expression that transforms into a powerful political intervention. By turning individual tragedies into collective moral narratives, victim figures such as Affan serve as catalysts that strengthen solidarity, morally legitimize movements, and fundamentally challenge the state's monopoly on violence.

Although the literature on democratization and civil society has grown significantly, most studies still focus on institutional dimensions such as political parties, parliaments, or general elections. Non-institutional political expression through public demonstrations is often viewed in part as a disruption to stability or an anomaly of democracy (Leitz, 2025; Lipsky, 1968; Nisnevich, 2022). This study seeks to address this academic gap by proposing an alternative perspective. Rather than viewing demonstrations as dysfunctional, this study aims to analyze them as a vital political arena. Therefore, this study is designed to answer two main questions: first, how do civil society-led street demonstrations effectively challenge state legitimacy in the context of Indonesian democracy? Second, to what extent do demonstrations function as a corrective mechanism for the various weaknesses inherent in formal democratic institutions?

The significance of this study lies in its conceptual effort to reframe demonstrations as an essential mechanism of democratic correction (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). While bridging the gap between structural and cultural approaches in political studies. The novelty of this article lies in the integration of macro-level analysis, which encompasses political and institutional structures with micro-level analysis that highlights the production of symbols, collective emotions, and moral narratives in protest actions. Thus, this study contributes in three main areas: enriching civil society theory by positioning it as a productive arena for the formation of legitimacy; expanding protest studies by emphasizing the deliberative and moral dimensions of collective mobilization; and developing research on democratic accountability through the concept of social accountability that operates beyond formal mechanisms. Empirically, an analysis of the August 2025 demonstrations reveals that the narrowing of civic space and the weakening of formal institutions have driven civil society to adopt street politics as the primary arena of struggle. The tragic death of Affan Kurniawan became a symbolic flashpoint that crystallized public sentiment and generated moral legitimacy for the resistance movement. Thus, this study affirms that demonstrations serve not only as a form of resistance but also as a vital mechanism in maintaining the sustainability and quality of democracy.

Research Methods

Although this study adopts a phenomenological perspective, its application is specifically directed toward the interpretation of mediated experiences as represented in texts and public narratives. Rather than relying on direct interviews, this study views media reports, civil society documents, and social media content as carriers of lived experiences that have been symbolically constructed and articulated in the public sphere. In this sense, phenomenology is not abandoned but rather recontextualized as documentary phenomenology, which focuses on how meaning is produced, circulated, and shared in the public sphere. Drawing on Husserl (1970) concept of intentionality, this analysis emphasizes how consciousness is directed toward the objects of

experience, in this case demonstrations, state violence, and martyrdom as they appear in discourse. Thus, this study does not capture individual experiences directly, but rather their intersubjective manifestations in available public narratives, which constitute a legitimate domain within phenomenological inquiry (Holstein & Gubrium, dalam Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The research data is documentary in nature, focusing on public texts and narratives regarding the demonstrations calling for the dissolution of parliament in August 2025. The data sources consist of several main categories. First, national and local mass media, which were purposively selected based on their reach, credibility, and tendencies in news framing. The national media sources used include Kompas, Tempo, and CNN Indonesia, which are known for their high journalistic standards and representation of mainstream discourse, while local media such as Tribun Network and Detik Sulsel were selected to capture the dynamics of events at the regional level and variations in local perspectives. This selection aims to provide a more comprehensive picture of the construction of public narratives, both at the national and local levels.

Second, reports from civil society organizations such as Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence, Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation, and Amnesty International, which contain quantitative data on victims, state violence, and forms of state repression. Third, official government documents in the form of regulations, press releases, and policy statements used to understand the state's position and response to the demonstrations. Fourth, social media content focused on the Twitter (X) and Instagram platforms, selected for their dominant role in mediating digital mobilization and the production of protest symbols in Indonesia. Twitter (X) was used to track the dynamics of public conversation, the spread of hashtags, and discursive networks, while Instagram was analyzed to identify forms of protest visualization such as digital posters, infographics, and murals. All data were selected purposefully based on their relevance to the research focus, namely state legitimacy, democratic corrective mechanisms, and the symbolization of martyrdom. To clarify the structure of the data sources and their contribution to the analysis, the classification of the documentary corpus is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Classification of Data Sources

Data Source	Type of Material	Analitical Contribution
National & Local Media	News Reports, Editorials, Live Coverage	Reconstruction of event chronology and discourse framing
Civil Society Organization Reports (Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence, Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation, Amnesty)	Victim data, repression reports, advocacy statements	Documentation of state response and accountability claims
Government Documents	Press releases, regulations, policy statements	Representation of official state narrative
Social Media Content	Hashtags, digital posters, viral videos, murals	Symbol formation, moral narratives, and politics of grief

Source: compiled by researchers

The data sources have different analytical functions but complement each other. The mass media is used to reconstruct the chronology and framing of discourse, civil society organization reports provide documentation on victims and state responses,

official government documents represent the state's formal narrative, while social media shows the production of symbols and articulation of public morality. This classification supports the triangulation process in understanding the dynamics of legitimacy and the politics of grief during the demonstration period.

The data collection technique was carried out through a systematic search strategy on Google using specific keywords such as "The House of Representatives dissolution demonstration," "parliamentary demonstration," or "Affan Kurniawan demonstration," and a time limit of August 25-31, 2025. This step ensured traceability and transparency in data selection (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014; Given, 2015). In addition, documentation techniques were used to archive legal sources, news, and visual products of the protests. Validity is strengthened through source triangulation, which involves comparing information from the media, civil society organizations, official documents, and social media (Flick, 2018; Tracy, 2010).

Data analysis was conducted by adapting the Miles & Huberman (2014) model, which consists of three stages: (1) data reduction, which involves coding data into initial themes such as mobilization, action repertoire, state response, legitimacy, corrective mechanisms, and martyr symbols; (2) data presentation, in the form of an event matrix and visualization of trends in protest escalation and state repressive responses; (3) drawing conclusions, namely connecting empirical findings with social movement theory, Habermas' public sphere, democratic accountability, and the politics of martyrdom. Using a documentary phenomenological framework, the analysis aims to interpret how the meaning of demonstrations is produced in public discourse and how the tragedy of Affan Kurniawan acquired symbolic value as a form of moral resistance.

Results and Discussion

Public Space and the Reconstruction of Democracy

The protests demanding the dissolution of the People's Representative Council on August 25–31, 2025, reflect a fundamental shift in the configuration of the public sphere and the relationship between the state and civil society in Indonesia. At this stage, street politics cannot be understood merely as a form of resistance or disruption to the state order, but rather as a reconstructive effort by society to restore the deliberative functions of democracy. To maintain analytical coherence, this study prioritizes the framework of the deliberative public sphere as the primary foundation for interpreting these dynamics, particularly in explaining how state legitimacy is negotiated in the interaction between the state and civil society. Within this framework, demonstrations are understood as a form of counter-public sphere transformation when formal deliberative spaces are distorted, so that the streets and digital spaces function as alternative arenas for the production of public opinion and the articulation of citizens' interests.

Concept of the transformation of the public sphere, modern democracy requires the existence of a deliberative arena that enables citizens to shape public opinion while simultaneously rationalizing power through communication free from domination. However, when formal institutions such as parliaments, political parties, and regulatory bodies lose their deliberative capacity, the public sphere undergoes distortion, as Habermas explains—namely, when communicative rationality is supplanted by instrumental economic and political interests. Under such conditions, contestative political theory becomes relevant as an analytical lens for understanding this distortion, which in turn reveals a structure of political opportunities that drives civil society mobilization through various repertoires of collective action. At the same time,

perspectives on democratic accountability and the politics of mourning enrich the analysis by demonstrating that demands on the state are not merely procedural but are also rooted in moral claims, collective emotions, and the symbolization of victims, which function as alternative sources of legitimacy in the public sphere.

This finding aligns with various studies showing that when formal public spaces are distorted, civil society tends to establish a counter-public sphere as an alternative arena for sustaining deliberative practices (Fisher et al., 2019; Mendonça & Ercan, 2015). In a global context, this phenomenon is also evident in various protest movements in emerging democracies, where the streets have transformed into spaces for political articulation that replace the weakened functions of representative institutions (Ishkanian, 2022; Merkel, 2026). Thus, the integration of this theoretical framework underscores that the dynamics of demonstrations operate not only at the structural level and in mobilization practices but also at the level of meaning production, where state legitimacy is continuously produced, questioned, and negotiated. In the Indonesian context, the transformation of the streets into an alternative public space is not an anomaly, but rather part of a broader pattern in contemporary democracy, where the boundaries between formal institutions and citizens' political practices are becoming increasingly fluid and filled with symbolic and deliberative contestation.

The political situation in Indonesia after 2020 shows that the narrowing of civil space has been carried out systematically through the state's regulatory policies and coercive practices. Regulations such as the revision of the Electronic Information and Transactions Law, the ratification of the Criminal Code Bill, and public security policies have limited citizens' expression and narrowed the space for political participation (Imran & Sardini, 2022; Indriasari & Karman, 2024; Uwalaka et al., 2025). As a result, civil society has lost formal channels to voice its political aspirations. As Cohen and Arato (1994) assert, civil society will create alternative arenas to maintain its moral and political autonomy when the state fails to provide a deliberative arena.

In this context, the deliberative public sphere approach serves as the primary framework for understanding the transformation of the political sphere from formal institutions to the streets as an alternative public sphere. This analysis is further reinforced by a contestative political perspective, which explains how this transformation is made possible by the opening up of political opportunity structures as well as the weakness of the state's institutional capacity. Thus, the shift in the public sphere is not merely a normative phenomenon, but also the result of contestative structural dynamics and collective practices.

Demonstrations demanding the dissolution of the The House of Representatives represented one form of an alternative arena within the public sphere, where the streets were transformed into an open people's parliament that enabled the direct articulation of moral and political discourse through collective action. Based on reports from Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence and Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation and media coverage of the 25–31 August 2025 protest wave, demonstrations were documented in at least 20 cities and urban locations, including Jakarta, Surabaya, Bandung, Makassar, Solo, and Yogyakarta; Semarang, Medan, Magelang, Bengkulu, Tegal, and Manokwari; Pontianak, Malang, and Samarinda; as well as Denpasar, Kupang, Cirebon, Kediri, Mataram, and Palu. These protests involved a cross-class network of students, laborers, informal workers, human rights activists, and segments of the middle class, indicating the re-emergence of a deliberative public sphere outside formal institutions, where citizens articulated grievances, contested state legitimacy, and reconstructed political communication beyond institutional limits.

Phenomenologically, these demonstrations can express collective consciousness born from shared social experiences. Husserl (1970) asserts that human consciousness always contains objects of experience. At this stage, experiences of repression, injustice, and political dysfunction became the basis for the collective consciousness of society. This process is reactive to the state and constructive in building new political meaning. The streets serve as a space for renegotiating the meaning of democracy between citizens and those in power.

In the context of public space, Habermas (1991) refers to the birth of a counter-public sphere, an alternative public space that emerges when the official public sphere loses credibility. The demonstrations calling for the dissolution of the The House of Representatives are a clear manifestation of this concept. Civil society reconstructs citizenship's more participatory and moral meaning through speeches, symbols, and collective rituals. Therefore, street politics is a deliberative manifestation that seeks to restore broken political communication between the state and the people.

Civil Society Mobilization as a Deliberative Process

The mobilization of civil society in protests demanding the dissolution of the House of Representatives reflects a deliberative process that has evolved through horizontal interactions among non-state actors, while also revealing broader contestative political dynamics. This aligns with Tilly & Tarrow (2015) theory of social movements, which emphasizes the importance of resource mobilization, a repertoire of resistance, and the structure of political opportunities as the primary prerequisites for collective action. In this context, mobilization is analyzed as an operational mechanism for the formation of an alternative public sphere, where the limitations of formal channels drive civil society to create arenas for political expression outside state institutions. However, this mobilization is not merely strategic but also deliberative, as it involves the production of meaning and collective reflection on justice, representation, and the legitimacy of power. Thus, demonstrations function not only as a practice of political contestation but also as a communicative space that integrates the structural logic of mobilization with the normative dimensions of the deliberative public sphere.

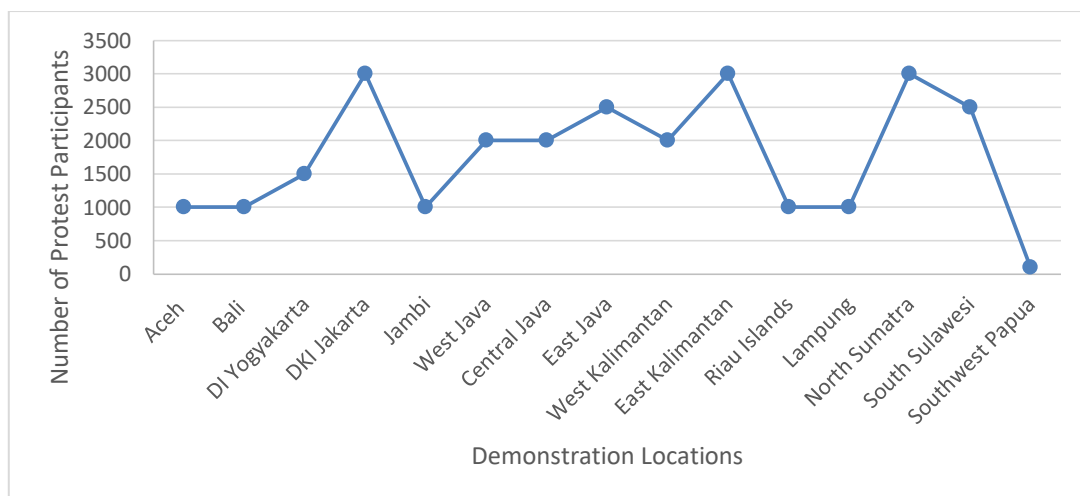


Figure 1. Number of Masses and Location Points
Source: Analysis of national online media, compiled by researchers.

This finding is evident in the mobilization patterns from August 25 to 31, 2025, which demonstrate that collective action evolves as an arena for the formation of

shared political consciousness while simultaneously serving as a mechanism for articulating civil society's moral demands on the state.

Based on media analysis, the action mobilization on August 25-31, 2025, involved thousands of participants from various elements of society, including students, labor unions, online motorcycle taxi communities, and civil society organizations (CSOs). This coalition does not have a rigid hierarchical structure, but operates through digital appeals and horizontal communication patterns manifested in various forms of invitations and mobilization of actions on various social media platforms. This phenomenon shows a shift in political deliberation practices from formal institutions to more open and participatory digital community networks.

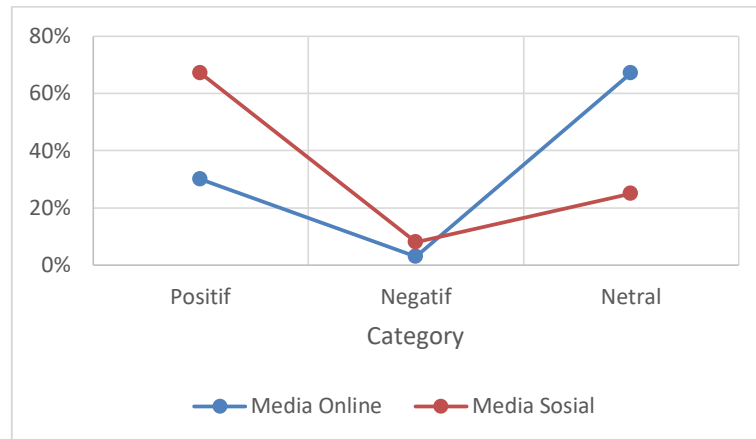


Figure 2. Analysis of conversation and news coverage of the Demonstration Period August 10–26, 2025
Source: Fahmi (2025), compiled by researchers

The issue of the August 25 demonstrations received widespread attention in the public sphere, as reflected in 2,978 news articles, 6,268 mentions in online media, and 23,165 mentions on social media. Sentiment analysis for the period August 10-26, 2025, shows that online media coverage was dominated by neutral sentiment (67%), with 30% positive and 3% negative, while social media conversations showed a proportion of 67% positive, 8% negative, and 25% neutral. Positive sentiment generally focused on updates regarding the dynamics of the protests at the House of Representatives building and in various regions, accompanied by criticism of the legislative body, which was considered ineffective, unresponsive to public interests, and rife with corruption.

In addition, public opinion perceived the dissolution of the House of Representatives as an effort to achieve budget efficiency and restore political morality. Conversely, negative sentiment emerged in the form of suspicion towards the actors behind the action and allegations of a hidden agenda related to efforts to impeach President Prabowo. These findings show that public discourse related to the action represents a protest against the legislative institution and also reflects the complexity of the power relations between state institutions and the public in the context of government legitimacy.

Furthermore, Fahmi (2025) recorded the volume of public conversations and interactions related to the demonstrations during the August 25 period, with 29,433 online conversations and more than 356 million public interactions on various major social media platforms (Twitter/X, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook). This figure illustrates the high public attention and participation level in the issues raised in the demonstrations. This massive digital activity indicates that the virtual public sphere

has transformed into a deliberative arena, where citizens negotiate the meaning of justice, political morality, and the legitimacy of state power.

In the context of political communication, Papacharissi (2014) explains that digital spaces have created networked publics, which are new arenas for deliberation that enable citizens to participate in politics through symbolic, narrative, and reflective interactions. This phenomenon was clearly seen in the intensity of online public discussions during the action period, when users not only disseminated information but also debated the legitimacy of the demands, the ethics of the action, and the ideal form of solidarity. This pattern shows that demonstrations function as a repertoire of resistance and as a laboratory of deliberative democracy, where citizens collectively express their moral and political reflections (Tilly, 2014).

Based on an analysis of news reports compiled from August 25–31, 2025, in 20 major cities, demonstrations demanding the dissolution of the The House of Representatives showed the formation of an open public forum as a participatory arena for citizens to express their political aspirations and ideas without institutional barriers. Various forms of public expression, such as field discussions, theatrical actions, and moral speeches, reflect the deliberative character of street politics, which emphasizes the articulation of the values of justice, accountability, and state responsibility. These demonstrations serve as a medium of political communication that reinforces public rationality and moral solidarity, while strengthening the reflective dimension of democracy in the public sphere.

McAdam et al., (2001) assert that the success of social movements is largely determined by the ability of collective actors to identify and capitalize on the political opportunity structure. In this context, the erosion of the House of Representatives' legitimacy due to ethical scandals and corruption, coupled with growing public dissatisfaction with government policies, created significant opportunities for the articulation of protest. However, interestingly, these opportunities were not merely exploited to completely delegitimize the state, but rather to reaffirm the normative dimension of democratic legitimacy itself. This indicates that the mobilization that occurred was not destructive, but rather reflective. That is, it sought to correct deviations in the exercise of power through moral pressure originating from civil society. Within this framework, demonstrations serve not only as expressions of dissatisfaction but also as a medium for reconstructing the ethical boundaries of state power.

Furthermore, this dynamic is reinforced by the transformation of mobilization patterns in the digital age. The phenomenon of network-based horizontal mobilization in this study aligns with the findings of (Papacharissi, 2015) as well as (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), which indicate that contemporary social movements are increasingly moving toward a form of connective action, that is, mobilization that no longer relies on formal organizational structures but rather on fluid and decentralized digital communication networks. This pattern enables the formation of more inclusive deliberative spaces, where collective moral reflection can be produced and disseminated rapidly, though at the same time it is vulnerable to discursive fragmentation (Theocharis et al., 2015). Thus, the mobilization in the August 2025 demonstrations not only reflects collective strength in seizing political opportunities but also marks a fundamental transformation in how civil society participates in politics, namely as a normative arena that continuously tests the rationality, legitimacy, and ethics of state power through digitally mediated deliberative practices.

The State, Accountability, and the Dilemma of Electoral Legitimacy

The protests from August 25 to 31, 2025, revealed the relationship between repressive state actions and the accompanying political legitimacy crisis. Based on reports from various sources, there were 3,337 arrests and more than 1,000 injuries as a result of actions taken by the authorities during the demonstrations. At this level, the state faces a dilemma between maintaining political stability and preserving the legitimacy of its democracy.

Table 2. Summary of Data on Violence and Victims of Demonstrations

Indicator	Number	Notes
Arrested	3,337	Accumulated arrests were made during the protests.
Injured	1,042	The accumulated number of injured victims taken to hospitals.
Total Deaths	10	Total fatalities during the protest period.
Deaths (Government Version)	8	Based on government statements, eight fatalities were reported.
Deaths (CSO Version)	10	Reports compiled by activists/volunteers gathered by HRW indicate ten fatalities.
Estimated Total Detained	3,000	Over 3,000 were detained; a minimum figure of 3,000 is used for data consistency.
Missing Persons Reports	44	Reports received by the Missing Persons Post of Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence related to incidents between August 25 and 31.
Found	42	Of the 44 reports, 42 were found; 33 experienced secret detention.

Source: Analysis of national online media, CSO reports, and official state information, compiled by researchers

The data in Table 1 were compiled using a triangulation approach that combines various sources, including national online media reports, civil society organization (CSO) reports, and official press releases from state institutions. This approach is intended to comprehensively represent the scale of state violence and community responses during the demonstrations. In analyzing data on violence, arrests, and the differing narratives between the state and civil society, this study employs the perspective of democratic accountability as an additional layer of analysis. Once the public sphere has been distorted and mobilization occurs as a form of contestation, the question that arises is how power is held accountable. In this context, demonstrations serve as a form of social accountability that complements and corrects the limitations of vertical and horizontal accountability within formal democratic systems.

Empirically, the data show that during this period, there were 3,337 arrests, 1,042 injuries, and 10 deaths according to civil society organizations. The government, through official press releases, only acknowledged eight deaths, while National Commission on Human Rights recorded at least 10 deaths based on reports from volunteers and activists in the field. The difference in these figures does not merely reflect technical discrepancies but indicates a contestation of legitimacy between the state and civil society. Both actors sought to construct their narratives of truth and moral responsibility in the public sphere.

In addition, Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence recorded 44 reports of missing persons, 42 of whom were found, and 33 of whom were known to have been subjected to secret detention. This practice reflects a pattern of non-transparent law enforcement and reinforces indications of weak horizontal

accountability mechanisms (O'Donnell, 1998). This imbalance reflects the dysfunctional political communication between the state and its citizens.

These data can be read as social texts representing political reality from multiple perspectives. The differences in findings between the government, the media, and civil society organizations (CSOs) reveal the plurality of discourse that shapes the public's understanding of the demonstrations. The quantitative data above serve as empirical evidence of state violence as well as a symbolic marker of the political and moral communication crisis that is at the heart of the issue of democratic legitimacy.

This crisis of legitimacy becomes even more apparent when linked to public perceptions of how the government handled the demonstrations. A Survey Median by AROPI (2025) found that 51.0% of respondents were dissatisfied with the government's handling of the situation, citing slow response (13.1%), repressive actions by the authorities (9.1%), and lack of policy change (8.2%) as the main reasons. Meanwhile, 44.3% expressed satisfaction, mainly because the government was responsive (17.5%) and successfully de-escalated the situation (8.4%). This data shows that although the government gained electoral legitimacy through elections, it lost moral legitimacy due to its failure to establish deliberative and responsive communication with the public.

These findings are consistent with the literature indicating that the state's use of violence in response to protests often deepens a crisis of legitimacy, particularly when not accompanied by transparency and accountability (Davenport, 2007; Earl, 2011). In many cases, repression actually reinforces public perceptions of injustice and drives the delegitimation of state institutions (Kadivar, 2018). Furthermore, studies on electoral democracy indicate that legitimacy derived from elections is not always sufficient to sustain public trust unless accompanied by responsiveness and effective political communication (Diamond, 2008; Norris, 2011). Thus, the legitimacy dilemma identified in this study reflects the structural tension between democratic procedures and society's moral demands.

Table 3. Public perception of the government's handling of demonstrations – August

Indicator	Percentage	Main Reason
Dissatisfied with the government's handling	51.0%	Slow response, repressive actions, and casualties occurred, and no positive changes occurred.
Satisfied with the government's handling	44.3%	Quick response and public visibility, corruption cases exposed, protests subsided, and public demands were addressed.
Very dissatisfied	14.8%	-
Very satisfied	11.5%	-

Source: Survey Median by AROPI 2025, compiled by researchers

Survey data confirms the existence of an electoral legitimacy dilemma, namely a situation in which political authorities that are legitimate through elections lose their moral legitimacy because they fail to meet ethical expectations and public communication. From Habermas (1991) perspective of the public sphere, this situation illustrates a distortion of communication when the state closes the space for deliberation and replaces it with the logic of security. Meanwhile, civil society responds by building a counter-public sphere through protests, independent reporting, and cross-community solidarity. The figures on violence and public dissatisfaction reflect the escalation of moral resistance that has grown amid the crisis of legitimacy, making street politics a deliberative space where citizens assert the values of justice and state responsibility.

O'Donnell (1998) distinguishes two forms of accountability in a democratic system: vertical accountability, which works through electoral mechanisms, and horizontal accountability, which is carried out between state institutions. However, in situations where both mechanisms are ineffective, civil society builds social accountability, a mechanism of moral and public oversight of power. The demonstrations calling for the dissolution of the The House of Representatives are a concrete manifestation of this form of social accountability.

Furthermore, data from the Asosiasi Riset & Opini Publik Indonesia (2025) reinforces this view, with 85.6% of the public expressing dissatisfaction with the The House of Representatives handling of the demonstrations, 53.7% expressing strong dissatisfaction, and only 11.7% expressing satisfaction. The dominant reasons for dissatisfaction were that the The House of Representatives dissolution demonstrang strong dissatisfaction, and only 11.7% expressing satisfaction. The dominant reasons for dissatisfaction were that the THE avoided the demonstrators (23.1%), did not listen to the aspirations of the people (9.8%), and prioritized their own interests (8.4%).

Table 4. Public perception of the The House of Representatives in handling demonstrations

Indicator	Percentage	Main Reason
Dissatisfied	85.6%	Avoided the crowd, lacked action, was slow to respond, ignored aspirations, and acted selfishly.
Satisfied	11.7%	Aspirations were considered fulfilled, and the situation was perceived as usual.
Very dissatisfied	53.7%	-

Source: Survey Median by AROPI (2025), compiled by researchers

This survey data indicates an acute deficit of public trust in representative institutions, reinforcing the thesis that the democratic crisis in Indonesia is more representational and moral than procedural. The dilemma of electoral legitimacy in Indonesia is caused by dissatisfaction with election results and the state's failure to maintain moral communication with its citizens. Demonstrations serve as a moral mirror that reminds the state of the normative basis of its power, that democratic legitimacy cannot be sustained solely through electoral procedures, but through continuous dialogue and communicative justice.

As Diamond (2006) argues that actual democratic legitimacy rests on a reciprocal relationship between the government and civil society, in which both sides listen to each other. Therefore, public protests serve to restore state legitimacy by reaffirming moral responsibility and democratic communication between the government and society.

The Politics of Grief as the Moral Language of Democracy

The phenomenon of political mourning in this study is not positioned as a standalone theoretical framework, but rather as an interpretive layer that complements the preceding analysis. Once demonstrations are understood as alternative public spaces and practices of political contestation, the politics of mourning explains how emotional and symbolic dimensions play a role in reinforcing moral claims against the state. Thus, collective emotions are not viewed as irrational elements, but as part of a communicative rationality that deepens the deliberative process within the public sphere.

One of the most significant aspects of the demonstrations calling for the dissolution of the House of Representatives in August 2025 was the emergence of a

phenomenon that can be described as the politics of grief, namely, the transformation of public sadness and anger into moral strength and collective solidarity. The tragic death of Affan Kurniawan, an online motorcycle taxi driver who was killed when he was hit by a tactical vehicle during the demonstration in Jakarta, became a new symbol for civil society in asserting the values of humanity and the moral responsibility of the state amid the repression of power.

Fahmi (2025) shows that public discussion of Affan's death reached around 34,000 mentions with more than 9.27 billion interactions across all social media platforms. The peak of conversation occurred on August 28-29, driven by the spread of amateur videos of the events on the ground and moral calls for justice for the victim. Public sentiment on social media was dominated by negative sentiment (97%), with grief being the most prominent emotion, followed by anger towards the authorities. In contrast, online media tended to be more positive (50%), as it highlighted statements from officials and official investigation measures.

The most shared posts showed rituals of solidarity and grief, such as the funeral procession for Affan in Jakarta and candlelight vigils in various cities. The hashtags #KamiBerduka (#WeMourn), #AffanKurniawan, and #PolisiPembunuh (#KillerPolice) became the primary channels for public moral articulation, indicating that the digital space was transforming into an ethical arena where citizens negotiated the meaning of humanity and the responsibility of the state.

Table 5. The Transformation of Public Mourning as the Moral Language of Democracy

Empirical Indicator	Main Findings	Interpretation (Moral Language of Democracy)
Volume and peak of conversation	34,124 mentions, 9.27 million interactions; peak on 28–29 August 2025 following a viral video and call for justice.	Indicates collective moral resonance, grief transformed into an ethical discourse demanding state legitimacy.
Dominant emotions	Grief (sadness), anger, and fear are the most dominant among online communities of motorbike drivers and victims' families.	Illustrates the transition from private emotions to collective moral consciousness, where grief becomes a public moral claim against the state.
Hashtags	#AffanKurniawan, #KamiBerduka, #PolisiPembunuh	Digital artifacts functioning as moral speech acts that turn suffering into claims for justice.
Public solidarity rituals	Candlelight vigils, video uploads of funeral processions, and public gatherings.	Represents cultural performance where collective grief strengthens solidarity and shapes a democratic moral community.
Framing of actors and state response	The public perceives the state apparatus as non-transparent and unconvincing; it demands a thorough and transparent investigation.	Reflects a crisis of political communication, where the public formulates alternative narratives grounded in moral rationality.
Direction of public discourse	Focus on accountability and ending violence, shifting toward politicization.	Indicates that politics works as accountability from below, a corrective mechanism of moral legitimacy for the state.

Source: Analysis of national online media, Fahmi (2025), and Median Survey by AROPI (2025), compiled by researchers.

The phenomenon of political grief in this study is also consistent with the literature emphasizing the role of emotions in social movements. (Jasper, 2011) and (Goodwin et al., 2013) demonstrate that emotions such as anger, sadness, and empathy play a crucial role in mobilizing collective participation and building solidarity. In this context, public grief functions not only as an emotional expression but also as a framing mechanism that transforms individual experiences into collective political claims. Therefore, the case of Affan Kurniawan can be understood as a concrete example of how public emotion operates as a political force capable of challenging state legitimacy.

This phenomenon shows that public mourning does not stop at the emotional realm, but also functions as a collective ethical statement. According to Judith Butler (2016), public mourning is a form of political intervention that affirms who is recognized as a human being who can mourn in the social order. By expressing their grief publicly, citizens reject the logic of power that denies recognition of victims. In this framework, mourning is a communicative moral act transforming personal suffering into a public claim for justice and state responsibility.

Through Juris (2014) lens of cultural performance, collective practices such as candlelight vigils and solidarity posts can be read as moral dramas affirming civil society's position as the leading actor in reconstructing the meaning of justice. These rituals form what Juris calls a moral community, namely a community that articulates shared values in the midst of a crisis of political legitimacy. The politics of grief serves to commemorate and also to repair public morality that has been fractured by state violence.

On the other hand, Habermas (1991), through his theory of the public sphere, asserts that democratic rationality is born of free and equal communication. When formal channels of political communication are blocked through repression, restrictions on freedom, or institutional silence, society creates alternative public spaces. In this case, social media and the streets appear as alternative spaces for the public that allow citizens to express their morals, replacing the procedural language of the state. Expressions of grief that spread massively in digital spaces represent a form of communicative action, namely a deliberative process that reminds the state of the limits of power and the human values that must be upheld.

The dynamics of public grief narratives center on three central moral claims: (1) demands for justice for victims, (2) demands for transparency and accountability from officials, and (3) cross-class social solidarity. These three claims show that the politics of grief is a corrective moral mechanism in democracy. This phenomenon restores the ethical dimension often lost in electoral politics, namely, the recognition of human suffering as the basis for the legitimacy of power.

Phenomenologically, the politics of grief can be understood as an intersubjective consciousness born of a shared experience of suffering and injustice (Husserl, 1970). Through the collective experience of demonstrations, the public affirms that democracy is not only an institutional system, but also a practice of empathy and shared responsibility. Grief becomes the moral language of democracy because this phenomenon demands that the state govern, listen, acknowledge, and take responsibility.

Overall, the phenomenon of Affan Kurniawan's death and the digital resonance it created demonstrate the transformation of street politics into moral politics. Collective grief restores the rationality of public communication that had been disrupted by violence and repression. This phenomenon confirms that in a democracy

under threat, sadness can become an ethical discourse, and solidarity can become the highest form of political communication.

Demonstrations as a Corrective Mechanism for Democracy: Between Resistance and Restoration

Public protests serve as a corrective mechanism to balance power and responsibility. In the context of post-reform democracy, when formal participation spaces have narrowed and representative institutions have lost public credibility, street politics has emerged as an alternative deliberative space. The public builds participatory and moral political communication through collective action on the streets and social media. The demonstrations demanding the dissolution of the House of Representatives in August 2025 represent a form of democratic corrective mechanism, namely non-electoral participation that corrects institutional weaknesses and restores moral responsibility in the political system.

Tilly and Tarrow (2015) explain that social movements can function as destabilizing or corrective agents that strengthen the political system. The demonstrations from August 25 to 31, 2025, showed a restorative orientation, as civil society sought to rebuild public trust in representative institutions through moral participation and collective action demanding transparency and political accountability.

The argument that demonstrations serve as a corrective mechanism of democracy is also supported by various studies showing that non-electoral participation can strengthen the quality of democracy by enhancing government accountability and responsiveness (Leach, 2016; Tarrow, 2011). In many cases, pressure from social movements actually drives policy reforms and expands the space for political participation (Whittier et al., 2001). Thus, in the Indonesian context, demonstrations are not merely a form of resistance but also part of the process of institutionalizing public demands within a democratic system.

Table 6. Discourse Patterns During Demonstrations

Text of Moral Declaration	Key Theme	Democratic Implications
"We reject oligarchic politics, we reject the silencing of the people's voice."	Moral resistance against the distortion of power and the silencing of public space.	This statement represents an ethical rejection of power concentration and restrictions on freedom of speech. Conceptually, the phrase emphasizes the corrective character of street-level politics .
"Politics should aim to ensure the welfare of the people, not merely serve the interests of the elite. If the elites remain indifferent, the people themselves must deliver the verdict at the ballot box."	Critique of power distortion and moral degradation of politics.	Reflects a critique of political deviation that should prioritize public welfare. The message underscores moral corrective discourse and raises collective awareness of the importance of electoral accountability.
"We urge the parliament to carry out its representative and oversight functions over the government."	Restoration of representative function and public accountability.	Represents an effort to correct institutional dysfunction through moral and digital participation. The message highlights social accountability and reaffirms democracy as a continuous corrective process sustained through public communication.

Source: Analysis of national online media, compiled by researchers.

An analysis of various public statements spread across online media during the protests shows that the protesters' main demands focused on transparency, accountability, and the restoration of the representative function of the House of Representatives. These calls reveal the corrective orientation of civil society movements that support the democratic system and seek to improve relations between the people and state institutions through moral participation and public communication. This discourse pattern can be summarized in three main moral themes that describe street politics as a corrective mechanism in democracy.

This moral declaration affirms the deliberative orientation of the civil society movement, whereby protests are understood as a means of restoring dialogue between the people and state institutions. This movement shows that non-electoral participation can be an ethical instrument for improving power relations without necessarily rejecting the system's legitimacy. (Diamond, 2006) asserts that the intensity of dialogue between the people and the government determines the quality of democracy. In this case, demonstrations become a mechanism for social dialogue that corrects power imbalances and strengthens the moral legitimacy of the state. The theoretical framework of Habermas and Burger (1991) helps us understand that mass actions such as these are a form of communicative action, namely, public communication aimed at improving social relations that the domination of power has disrupted.

Empirically, several state institutions have begun to respond to public pressure and demands. The House of Representatives has held public hearings with civil society organizations, and several members of parliament have been urged to improve their ethics and communication with the public. These steps demonstrate an institutional awareness that legitimacy cannot be maintained through coercive power but through moral communication and transparency. O'Donnell (1998) this phenomenon is called social accountability institutionalization, when moral pressure from civil society pushes the state to build new mechanisms to maintain its accountability.

However, the process of democratic correction is not entirely risk-free. When the state responds with excessive repression, protests have the potential to develop into a spiral of distrust that deepens the crisis of legitimacy (Christmas & Angelina, 2022; Fishman, 2025). Nevertheless, the pattern that has emerged in Indonesia shows a different direction, namely that street politics has developed into a space for learning democracy, where people learn to organize, dialogue, and negotiate interests. Therefore, demonstrations demanding the dissolution of the The House of Representatives can be understood as a deliberative corrective mechanism that improves communication between the state and citizens and strengthens the moral accountability of democracy. In this framework, a healthy democracy is not one without protests, but one capable of transforming protests into dialogue.

Overall, the integration of the frameworks of public space, contestatory politics, democratic accountability, and the politics of mourning suggests that demonstrations operate on three analytical levels: (1) as a transformation of public space (the normative dimension), (2) as a practice of political contestation (structural dimension), and (3) as an articulation of moral claims through symbols and collective emotions (cultural dimension). These three layers do not stand apart but form a unified analytical framework that explains how state legitimacy is produced, questioned, and corrected in contemporary democratic practice.

Conclusion

This study shows that the demonstrations from August 25 to 31, 2025 played a role in correcting the legitimacy of the state through three interrelated mechanisms: the articulation of moral resistance to the distortion of power and the narrowing of civil space; the formation of a counter-public sphere on the streets and in digital spaces that restored deliberative functions when formal channels were blocked; and the emergence of the politics of grief, which transformed individual loss (Affan Kurniawan) into a collective ethical claim for justice and accountability. This dynamic shows that political legitimacy is determined by electoral procedures and the state's ability to maintain moral communication with its citizens.

The results of media analysis, Drone Emprit data (Fahmi, 2025), and Median Surveys show high public attention to the protests, accompanied by an electoral legitimacy dilemma in which the legitimacy of the authorities through elections has declined due to weak public communication and the state's repressive response. Within the framework of Habermas' public sphere and contentious politics theory, street politics functions as a democracy corrective mechanism that strengthens communicative rationality and revives social accountability from below.

Normatively, strengthening democracy requires protecting civil space and freedom of expression, handling actions based on the principle of minimum use of force, and institutionalizing transparent public dialogue between the community and state institutions. In this framework, demonstrations are not a sign of instability, but rather an indicator of democratic vitality, a space where citizens strengthen political communication, restore moral accountability, and ensure that the legitimacy of power is based on justice and humanity.

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