

Management of Demonstrations by Local Governments and Relevant Authorities: An Analysis of Their Roles and Impact on Public Order and the Protection of the Community

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Keywords:		ABSTRACT
Conflict	Management;	Demonstrations as a form of public participation in local democracy often face tensions with authorities, particularly when communication and conflict management mechanisms are ineffective. The demonstration at the Central Java Governor's Office in Semarang on August 29, 2025, which began peacefully but escalated into mass riots causing substantial damage and public disruption, highlights the urgent need to evaluate how local governments and relevant authorities manage demonstrations and their implications for public order and community protection. This research analyzes the role of local governments and relevant authorities in managing demonstrations, as well as their implications for public order and community protection. The study used a qualitative approach with narrative-descriptive analysis of interviews with 20 respondents (10 officers and 10 demonstrators) and linked them to a conflict governance lens. The data show that initially peaceful demonstrations turned into mass riots due to the motive of demands for justice for victims of violence by officers and rejection of government policies deemed not in favor of the people. The security approach of officers was predominantly repressive, while the Public Order Agency (Satpol PP) played an administrative role. There was a sharp contrast in perception between officers who considered security measures in accordance with SOPs and demonstrators who considered the actions arrogant and traumatic. Conflict governance is still oriented solely towards maintaining order, thus recommending a transformation to a dialogue policing model, the implementation of the Elaborated Social Identity Model, multi-agency coordination, digital narrative monitoring, and human rights-based post-action evaluation.
Demonstration	De-Escalation;	
Dialogue	Policing;	
Coordination; Human Rights.	Institutional	

INTRODUCTION

Regional governments (*Pemda*) and related officials (civil bureaucracy and law enforcement) have a strategic role and function in public sector management as a manifestation of state authority exercised at the local level. Regional governments are positioned as the primary actors in the implementation of concurrent government affairs, particularly those related to public services, public order, and community protection. Within the framework of modern governance, regional governments are no longer understood merely as implementers of central policies, but rather as government entities with autonomy, discretion, and political responsibility to manage public affairs according to the needs and characteristics of their local communities. The contemporary governance perspective emphasizes that the functions of

regional governments include roles as regulators, facilitators, and coordinators of various public interests, which are implemented through a network of state and non-state actors (Ansell & Torfing, 2021). Relevant officials (such as Bhabinkamtibmas, Babinsa, and Linmas) play a role in strengthening the institutional capacity of regional governments in ensuring legal certainty, social order, and community protection. Synergy between regional governments and officials is thus a prerequisite for the implementation of effective, democratic, and public interest-oriented public sector management.

In the context of local democracy, demonstrations occupy a strategic position as a mechanism for public control over governance. Demonstrations are understood as a form of non-electoral political participation that allows citizens to express aspirations, criticism, and resistance to public policies outside formal channels of representation. Collective expression in the public sphere is a crucial element in maintaining government responsiveness and legitimacy, particularly when institutional channels are deemed inadequate or less representative. From a local government perspective, demonstrations serve as social and political signals that reflect the tension between public policy and public expectations. Therefore, managing demonstrations cannot be reduced to efforts to restrict freedom of expression, but must be understood as part of managing public participation within a democratic governance system.

However, demonstrations as a socio-political practice are not free from the potential for conflict and friction between the actors involved. Contemporary studies of social movements and street politics show that interactions between demonstrators and authorities are often tense due to differences in objectives, logic of action, and perceptions of threat (Rocchetti & Pilati, 2025). On the one hand, demonstrators seek to maximize visibility and political pressure through mass mobilization in public spaces; on the other hand, authorities are mandated to enforce the law and prevent escalation of security disturbances. Friction is almost inevitable, especially when communication, trust, and mediation mechanisms between local governments, authorities, and the community are ineffective. Recent literature emphasizes the importance of a demonstration management approach based on de-escalation, dialogue, and proportionality, to minimize violence while protecting civil rights (UN, 2020).

Public order is a key element in demonstration management because it is directly related to the capacity of local governments to maintain social stability while ensuring the continuity of democratic public space. Public order is not simply the absence of disturbances, but rather the result of legitimate conflict management, where political expression can take place safely, orderly, and inclusively. (Mazerolle et al., 2013). This can only be achieved when local governments and authorities implement a procedural justice- based approach, emphasizing procedural fairness, proportionality, and the protection of human rights in securing demonstrations (Barber & Tankebe, 2024; Boateng & Darko, 2021). Conversely, a dominant coercive approach tends to escalate conflict and undermine public trust (Nägel & Nivette, 2021).

The demonstration at the Central Java Governor's Office in Semarang on August 29, 2025, serves as a critical case study in understanding the complexities of demonstration management in Indonesia. Initially peaceful, the demonstration escalated into mass riots driven by demands for justice for victims of violence by officers, including the death of Iko Juliant Junior, a student at Semarang State University, and Affan Kurniawan, an online motorcycle

taxi driver in Jakarta who was killed by a Brimob tactical vehicle. Additional grievances included rejection of government policies considered detrimental to the public, such as low wages, outsourcing, mass layoffs, unfair tax policies, and perceived excessive official allowances, as well as demands for more transparent discussion of the Asset Confiscation Bill and revision of the Criminal Code (R-KUHAP).

The demonstration, which initially took place in front of the Central Java Regional Police Headquarters, later moved to the Governor's Office complex in the afternoon and evening, marked by chaos. The masses managed to break through the back gate, causing damage, and burning a number of regional government assets. At least four cars were burned, accompanied by damage to several motorcycles and other facilities, with total losses to the City Government estimated at 900 billion rupiah (Hariyanto, 2025; Senjaya, 2025; Laeis, 2025; Nurmayanti, 2025).

Although various studies have examined the management of demonstrations and public order in Indonesia, limited attention has been given to the specific dynamics of conflict governance between local governments and relevant authorities in the context of escalating protests. Previous research has largely focused on either legal frameworks or security approaches without thoroughly analyzing the perceptions of both officers and demonstrators as key actors in the conflict. Furthermore, the role of the Public Order Agency (Satpol PP) in demonstration management and its coordination with the National Police (Polri) has not been comprehensively studied. The sharp contrast in perception between officers and demonstrators, as well as the implications of repressive approaches on public order and community protection, remain underexplored. This gap underscores the need for research that specifically examines the roles, approaches, and impacts of local governments and relevant authorities in managing demonstrations, using a conflict governance lens that captures the perspectives of both officers and demonstrators. Therefore, effective demonstration management requires a balance between enforcing order, building institutional legitimacy, and respecting the principles of local democracy (Stott et al., 2026).

This study aims to analyse the role of local governments and related officials in managing demonstrations as part of public order governance at the local level, related to the approach patterns and demonstration management practices carried out by government actors and officials in responding to political expressions of the community in public spaces, while also examining the implications of such management on public order conditions. Theoretically, this research enriches the literature on conflict governance and demonstration management in democratic contexts, particularly in developing countries. Practically, the findings offer strategic recommendations for local governments, the National Police, and the Public Order Agency in formulating more effective, dialogical, and human rights-oriented demonstration management protocols, as well as enhancing inter-agency coordination and officer training to prevent escalation and protect both public order and the rights of demonstrators.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach using narrative-descriptive analysis techniques. The study focused on the Semarang City Demonstration phenomenon on August 29, 2025. Data collection involved 20 respondents, consisting of 10 officers (RA) and 10 demonstrators (RD). Interviews were conducted to determine the motives for the demonstration

and the reactions of the local government and related officers during the demonstration. Furthermore, the interview results were sharpened through themes and analyzed interpretively by linking them to the lens of conflict governance.

Data analysis was conducted through several stages: data reduction by selecting and categorizing interview results based on emerging themes, data display through narrative presentation of findings from both respondent groups, and conclusion drawing through interpretative analysis linking empirical findings to conflict governance theory. The analysis focused on identifying patterns of perception, approaches to demonstration management, and their implications for public order and community protection. To maintain research ethics, data collection was conducted after obtaining respondent consent and at a time and location determined by the respondents. No personal data was recorded during the study, and documentation was limited to narrative notes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demonstration Motive

The demonstration at the Central Java Governor's Office, Semarang City, on August 29, 2025 began with a peaceful demonstration demanding justice for victims of violence by the authorities (such as the death of Iko Juliant Junior, a student at Semarang State University who died on August 31, 2025 and Affan Kurniawan, an online motorcycle taxi driver in Jakarta who was killed by a Brimob tactical vehicle on August 28, 2025) as well as rejection of government policies that were considered detrimental to the people (including rejection of various policies that were considered not in favor of the common people, such as low wages, outsourcing, mass layoffs, and unfair tax and state budget policies), including official allowances (DPRD housing allowance of IDR 50 million per month and daily salary of around IDR 3 million) and revision of the Criminal Code (R-KUHAP) as well as demands for more transparent discussion of the Asset Confiscation Bill.

The demonstration initially took place in front of the Central Java Regional Police Headquarters, then moved to the Governor's Office complex in the afternoon and evening, which was marked by chaos. The masses managed to break through the back gate, causing damage, and burning a number of regional government assets. It was recorded that at least four cars were burned, accompanied by damage to a number of motorcycles (3 of which were burned) (Hariyanto, 2025; Senjaya, 2025a), as well as other facilities such as stalls, a Satpol PP post, a broken iron gate fence, and a guard post with damaged glass (Laeis, 2025b). The total loss to the City Government was estimated at 900 billion rupiah (Nurmayanti, 2025).

Views of the Authorities and Demonstrators

The management of the demonstrations by the local government and related authorities, including the Public Order Agency (Satpol PP) and the National Police (Polri), demonstrated a predominantly repressive approach during the escalation phase. Police used water cannons and tear gas to control the crowds, while the Satpol PP played a more administrative role and protected assets, in accordance with its regulatory authority under Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government. However, this response did not completely prevent the riots, partly due to the limited repressive authority of the Satpol PP, a lack of optimal coordination, and external factors such as provocation, the influence of social media, and the rapid escalation of mass emotions.

The authorities' views on the implementation of security measures during the demonstration on August 29, 2025, at the Central Java Governor's Office in Semarang were generally positive and emphasized adherence to standard operating procedures. Respondents stated that security measures were in accordance with applicable standards. Perceived obstacles included physical and mental fatigue (RA1 and 7), poor communication between parties (RA2, 5, and 6), and anarchic actions by some demonstrators, including provocation, throwing objects, and arson (RA3, 4, 8, 9, and 10). Several respondents also highlighted the role of third-party provocation and the uncontrolled influence of social media as triggers for escalation (RA5 and 9).

In contrast, demonstrators' perceptions of the officers' attitudes and actions tended to be very negative. Of the ten demonstrators, eight stated that the officers' actions were not in accordance with standard operating procedures or even exceeded reasonable limits. Some striking quotes include: "No, many things were outside the SOP. They seemed arrogant and even arbitrary" (RD 1), "Many things were beyond the limits" (RD 4), "There was chaos, many things that officers should not have done" (RD 5), "Immoral, oppressing each other" (RD 6), "Oppressing many friends who were doused with tear gas" (RD 7), and "Not really beyond the SOP. Chaos" (RD 9). The impacts felt by demonstrators included psychological trauma (RD 1), physical exhaustion (RD 4), and strong feelings of anxiety and worry about the issue of "martial law" circulating in the community (RD 2, 4, 5, 9, and 10).

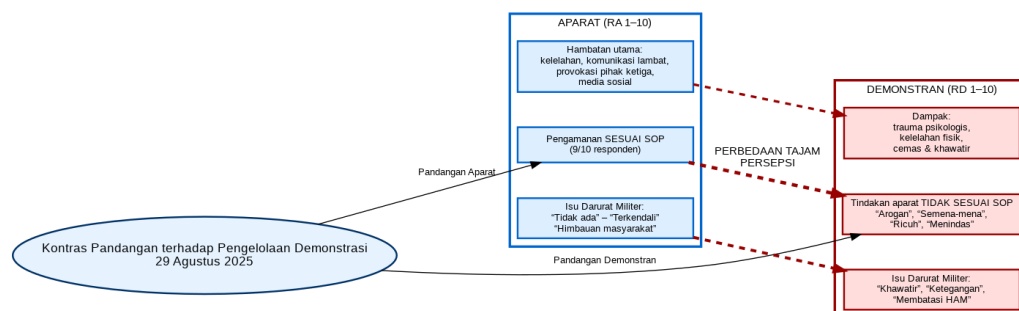


Figure 1. Respondents' narrative views
Source: Interview data analysis, 2025

The implications of this management for public order and community protection include substantial disruption to public order, damage to state facilities, and psychological impacts on participants and surrounding residents. Although the right to express opinions is guaranteed by the constitution, the escalation into anarchy demonstrates the challenge of balancing freedom of expression with protecting the wider community. These findings emphasize the need for improved communication between parties, humane crowd control training, social media monitoring, and evaluation of coordination between local governments, the National Police (Polri), and the Public Order Agency (Satpol PP) to prevent similar incidents in the future and maintain the stability of local democracy.

Conflict Management

Conflict governance in managing public demonstrations is a systematic framework that includes prevention strategies, ongoing communication, inter-institutional coordination, and a de-escalation approach to transform potential violence into more constructive interactions that

respect human rights (Stott et al., 2026). In the case of the demonstration at the Central Java Governor's Office, Semarang, on August 29, 2025, the conflict governance implemented tended to be reactive-repressive, characterized by the dominant use of *water cannons* and tear gas as the main response to mass escalation, while intensive dialogue and negotiation efforts with demonstrators' leaders were relatively minimal, thus reflecting a *command-and-control model* rather than *facilitated engagement*. (Kwon, 2025; Morgan & Harfield, 2025; Vitale, 2017).

The above approach, within the lens of governance theory, is considered contradictory to contemporary findings showing that perceptions of undignified treatment by authorities can strengthen protest group identity and legitimize confrontational actions. *Dialogue policing models* that prioritize early communication and the presence of trained *liaison officers* are more effective in reducing levels of violence than paramilitary approaches (Maguire et al., 2025; McLean et al., 2026; Morgan & Harfield, 2025; Wozniak & Conti, 2025). Furthermore, the fragmentation of authority between the National Police (Polri) and the Public Order Agency (Satpol PP) and the lack of coordination with local governments further exacerbate the situation, in line with findings that institutional misalignment often hinders a coordinated response in managing mass protests (Earl et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the rapid spread of provocative narratives and disinformation by social media further complicates governance, as failure to manage digital narratives exacerbates perceptions of indignity among demonstrators (Earl et al., 2022). Consequently, this repressive approach not only triggers massive physical damage to state assets but also creates collective psychological trauma and long-term distrust of security institutions, potentially fueling subsequent, more radical protests (Busher et al., 2025; Onursal, 2025).

The Semarang demonstration case illustrates the weaknesses of conflict governance in Indonesia, which is still oriented solely towards maintaining order, thus urging a transformation towards a more inclusive, *rights-based* and dialogical model to maintain democratic stability at the local level. This transformation can be realized through several theory-based policy recommendations. First, local governments and the Indonesian National Police need to adopt a dialogue policing model that emphasizes intensive communication from the pre-action stage through the assignment of trained liaison officers, as recommended by Stott et al. (2025) within the Columbus Model framework, which has been proven effective in reducing escalation through building trust and managing group identity (Stott et al., 2026).

Second, mandatory officer training based on the Elaborated Social Identity Model (ESIM) to increase awareness that excessive repressive measures can create a perception of indignity that triggers the legitimacy of collective violence (Ayanian et al., 2025). Third, it is necessary to establish a clear and tiered formal multi-agency coordination mechanism (Polri–Satpol PP–Pemda), including a joint protocol for the transition from an administrative approach to dialogical security, in accordance with findings Ayanian et al. (2025) on the integration of individual, group, and structural levels in collective action under repression. Fourth, digital narrative management is a priority through a proactive and transparent social media monitoring unit, because failure to address disinformation exacerbates perceptions of injustice (Earl et al., 2022). Fifth, every demonstration management must be followed by an independent and accountable post-action evaluation to strengthen organizational learning and guarantee victims'

rights, in line with the principle of *rights-based policing* that places human rights protection as a primary principle (Onursal, 2025).

The following is a synthesis of conflict management based on the demonstration in Semarang City on August 29, 2025.

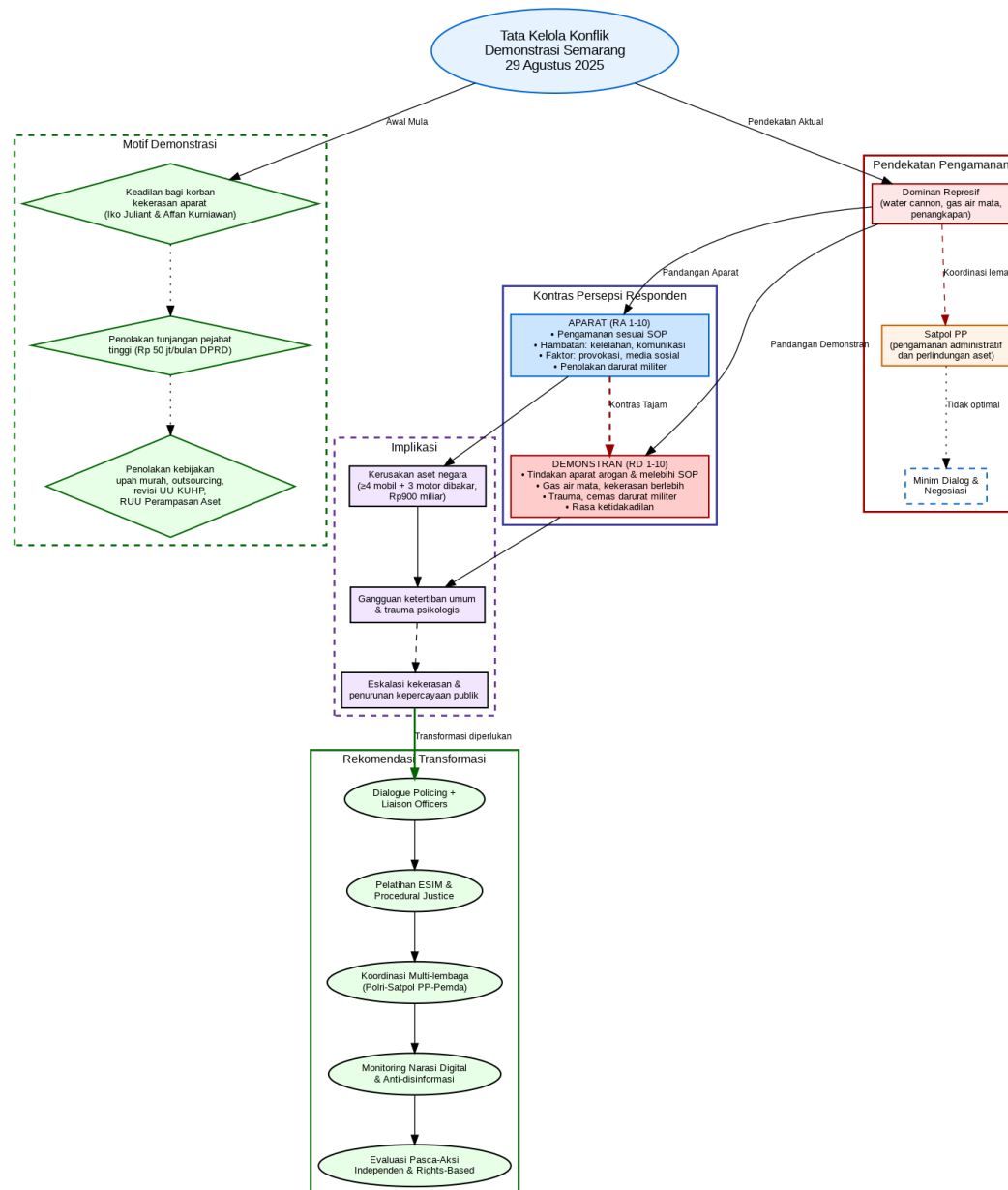


Figure 2 of conflict governance chart

Source: Author's synthesis based on interview findings and conflict governance theory, 2025

CONCLUSION

The August 29, 2025 demonstration at the Central Java Governor's Office in Semarang revealed conflict management that still relies on a repressive-reactive approach rather than a preventive-dialogical one, thus triggering an escalation of violence, damage to state assets worth hundreds of billions of rupiah, psychological trauma for demonstrators, and widespread disruption of public order. The sharp contrast in perception between officers who claim

compliance with SOPs and demonstrators who perceive arrogance and excessive violence demonstrates weak communication, inter-institutional coordination, and digital narrative management. Effective demonstration management cannot focus solely on enforcing order, but must be based on human rights, procedural justice, and a dialogue policing model. Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed. For local governments, it is recommended to establish formal multi-agency coordination protocols involving the Regional Government, National Police, and Public Order Agency, including joint standard operating procedures for transition from administrative approaches to dialogical security measures. For the National Police, mandatory officer training based on the Elaborated Social Identity Model (ESIM) is recommended to increase awareness that excessive repressive measures can create perceptions of indignity that trigger collective violence, as well as adoption of a dialogue policing model that emphasizes intensive communication from the pre-action stage through trained liaison officers. For the Public Order Agency, strengthening administrative and mediation capacities is recommended to enable early intervention before security escalation occurs. For digital narrative management, establishment of a proactive and transparent social media monitoring unit is recommended to address disinformation that exacerbates perceptions of injustice. For future researchers, further studies are recommended to examine the long-term effectiveness of dialogue policing implementation in various regional contexts across Indonesia, as well as comparative studies between regions with different approaches to demonstration management.

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