

**PROTEST, POLICY, AND PUBLIC SPACE: ANALYZING THE DYNAMICS OF RECENT DEMONSTRATIONS**

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**ABSTRACT;** *The aim of this study is to examine the correlation among guardianship, governmental regulation, and the utilization of public space in the present demonstration context. Protests are a type of political participation that is becoming more popular. They are a way for people to share their hopes, push for change, and make their voices heard. Conversely, demonstration practices often lead to issues, whether pertaining to regulations or governmental strategies. This study elucidates the significance of public space as a crucial platform for collective expression, negotiation, and contestation between the populace and the nation, employing a qualitative and case study methodology. Public spaces are more than just physical places; they are also symbols of democracy that show a strong and resilient society. On the other hand, the government's policy framework and security approach have been shown to affect the direction of the movement, the level of participation, and even the public's view of the quality of democracy. The results of the analysis show that the management of demonstrations in public spaces reflects the fundamental tension between the state authorities in maintaining stability and the civil rights that demand freedom. It is necessary to have policies that are more balanced, open to everyone, and focused on dialogue so that protests can be managed as part of a democratic process, not just as a threat to public order.*

**Keywords:** *Protest, Public Policy, Public Space, Political Participation, Democracy).*

**ABSTRAK;** Tujuan studi ini adalah untuk mengkaji korelasi antara perwalian, regulasi pemerintah, dan pemanfaatan ruang publik dalam konteks demonstrasi saat ini. Protes merupakan salah satu bentuk partisipasi politik yang semakin populer. Protes merupakan cara bagi masyarakat untuk menyampaikan harapan, mendorong perubahan, dan menyuarakan pendapat mereka. Di sisi lain, praktik demonstrasi seringkali menimbulkan permasalahan, baik terkait regulasi maupun strategi pemerintah. Studi ini menguraikan signifikansi ruang publik sebagai wadah krusial bagi ekspresi kolektif, negosiasi, dan kontestasi antara masyarakat dan bangsa, dengan menggunakan metodologi kualitatif dan studi kasus. Ruang publik lebih dari sekadar tempat fisik; ruang publik juga merupakan simbol demokrasi yang menunjukkan masyarakat yang kuat dan

tangguh. Di sisi lain, kerangka kebijakan pemerintah dan pendekatan keamanan terbukti memengaruhi arah gerakan, tingkat partisipasi, dan bahkan pandangan publik terhadap kualitas demokrasi. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa pengelolaan demonstrasi di ruang publik mencerminkan ketegangan fundamental antara otoritas negara dalam menjaga stabilitas dan hak-hak sipil yang menuntut kebebasan. Diperlukan kebijakan yang lebih seimbang, terbuka bagi semua orang, dan berfokus pada dialog sehingga protes dapat dikelola sebagai bagian dari proses demokrasi, bukan hanya sebagai ancaman terhadap ketertiban umum.

**Kata Kunci:** Protes, Kebijakan Publik, Ruang Publik, Partisipasi Politik, Demokrasi).

## INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, protests and demonstrations have become one of the most important ways for people to get involved in politics. Collective action in public spaces not only functions as a means to voice aspirations, but also as a form of social control over government policies. This phenomenon demonstrates that public space serves a strategic role as a democratic arena, facilitating interaction between the state and its citizens. However, the increasing frequency and intensity of demonstrations raise questions about how the government responds to these actions, both through policy and security measures.

In contemporary political developments, demonstrations have emerged as one of the most prominent forms of political participation. Citizens utilize protests not only as a means of voicing their aspirations and criticizing government policies but also as an affirmation of civil rights guaranteed in democratic systems. The increasing frequency and intensity of protest movements across the globe, including in Indonesia, illustrate that public spaces serve not merely as sites of social interaction but also as strategic arenas for democratic practices.

Public space, which by nature is a shared domain, often becomes a meeting point as well as a contested arena between civil society interests and state authority. Demonstrations held in public spaces are frequently influenced by regulations that restrict freedom of expression in the name of public order and security. On the other hand, tightened policies and repressive approaches may escalate conflict, weaken government legitimacy, and generate negative perceptions of democratic practices. Hence, analyzing the role of public

space in protest dynamics is crucial for understanding the relationship between power and civil rights within the framework of democracy.

Furthermore, the dynamics of demonstrations are shaped not only by the actors involved and the issues raised but also by how government policies are formulated and implemented. Policy responses that are dialogical and participatory can strengthen state legitimacy and channel public aspirations constructively. Conversely, coercive responses risk fostering political alienation, widening the gap between society and the state, and undermining democratic values. Thus, the study of protest, policy, and public space offers an important contribution to assessing the quality of contemporary democracy.

Based on this context, the present study focuses on analyzing the interaction between protest, policy, and public space in recent demonstrations. This research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how public spaces function as arenas of collective expression, how government policies shape the trajectory of protests, and to what extent these dynamics reflect the state of democracy.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The study of protests, public policy, and the utilization of public space has been widely explored in political science, sociology, and urban studies. Existing scholarship provides several theoretical perspectives that are essential for understanding the dynamics of recent demonstrations.

### **Protests as a Form of Political Participation**

Protests are often conceptualized as one of the most direct forms of political participation. Tilly (2004) defines contentious politics as collective actions undertaken by citizens to challenge authorities, demand rights, or resist policies. Similarly, Della Porta and Diani (2006) argue that protests are not only reactive events but also proactive strategies through which citizens seek to influence public policy. These studies highlight that demonstrations represent both discontent and constructive engagement in the democratic process.

### **Public Space as a Democratic Arena**

The concept of public space is central to understanding how protests are organized and perceived. Habermas (1989) emphasizes the idea of the “public sphere” as a domain where citizens deliberate and express opinions, forming the foundation of democratic life. Scholars such as Mitchell (2003) and Low & Smith (2006) further explain that public spaces are contested arenas, constantly shaped by power relations between state authorities and civil society. In the context of demonstrations, public space becomes both a platform for collective expression and a site of negotiation between freedom and order.

## **Policy and the Regulation of Protest**

Government policies play a decisive role in shaping the conditions under which protests occur. McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) highlight that state responses—whether facilitative or repressive—significantly influence the trajectory and outcomes of social movements. In many contexts, regulatory frameworks governing freedom of assembly are justified in the name of security and order but may simultaneously restrict democratic rights (Davenport, 2007). Empirical studies in Southeast Asia and Indonesia (Aspinall, 2013; Mietzner, 2015) have shown that legal restrictions and heavy-handed policing often escalate tensions rather than resolve underlying grievances.

## **Interactions Between Protest, Policy, and Space**

Recent literature suggests that the interaction between protest, policy, and public space reflects broader questions of democracy and governance. Don Mitchell’s (2003) notion of the “right to the city” underscores that access to public space is inseparable from political rights. Similarly, Harvey (2012) argues that urban spaces are not neutral; they embody struggles over power, representation, and justice. In this sense, the regulation of demonstrations in public spaces illustrates the fundamental tension between civil liberties and state control.

## **Research Gap**

While many studies have analyzed protests and social movements globally, there remains a need to examine how recent demonstrations in Indonesia (and comparable contexts) reveal the interplay between public policy, spatial dynamics, and democratic

practices. Previous research has either focused on the legal aspects of protest regulation or on the sociology of collective action, but relatively few have integrated these dimensions to explore how public spaces function simultaneously as democratic arenas and instruments of governance.

This study seeks to fill that gap by combining theoretical insights on political participation, public space, and state regulation, and applying them to the case of recent demonstrations. By doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how protests both reflect and reshape the quality of democracy in contemporary societies.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach to analyze the relationship between protests, public policy, and the use of public space. The method was chosen because demonstrations are not only political events but also social practices shaped by law, governance, and urban settings. A qualitative design allows the research to capture narratives, meanings, and symbolic dimensions that quantitative data would overlook. (Felix de Souza, 2023)

The research relies on three main strategies. First, a literature review is conducted to build a theoretical foundation on social movements, public space, and democratic participation. Second, document and policy analysis examines regulations, government statements, and legal frameworks governing freedom of assembly. Third, media sources and archives are reviewed to trace the framing and evolution of recent demonstrations. Where possible, field observations and semi-structured interviews are also included to capture firsthand experiences from protesters, policymakers, and affected communities. (Kvale, 2011)

The materials used are divided into two categories. Primary materials include interview transcripts, observation notes, and visual documentation from protest sites. Secondary materials consist of scholarly books, peer-reviewed articles, government publications, and media reports.

This methodological choice reflects the view that protests represent an ongoing dialogue between citizens and the state. By combining theoretical insights with empirical evidence, the study aims to understand how policies shape demonstrations, how public

spaces become contested arenas, and how protests influence the meaning of democratic participation (Bryman, 2016).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The analysis of recent demonstrations reveals several key findings. First, the protests were primarily driven by widespread dissatisfaction with newly introduced government policies, which were perceived as limiting social justice and weakening democratic values. This discontent was amplified by the rapid circulation of information and mobilization through social media platforms, allowing diverse groups of participants to unite under shared concerns.

Second, public spaces played a dual role throughout the demonstrations. On one hand, they served as symbolic arenas for citizens to exercise freedom of expression and collective identity. On the other hand, they became highly contested zones as state authorities attempted to regulate, restrict, or disperse gatherings, thereby reinforcing the tension between public rights and governmental control.

Third, the findings highlight the emergence of new forms of civic engagement. While traditional student and labor movements continued to be at the forefront, broader participation from youth communities, professional groups, and civil society networks demonstrated a shift toward more decentralized and inclusive protest cultures.

Finally, the protests underscored the fragile balance between democracy and security. While the demonstrations amplified calls for policy reform, they also exposed challenges in governance, including the handling of dissent, negotiation with citizens, and the management of public order in ways that respect democratic principles.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study shows that protests in public spaces reflect the tension between civil rights and state authority. Public space acts as both a democratic arena and a contested site shaped by government policies. A balanced, dialogical approach is needed so that demonstrations are managed as part of democracy, not merely as threats to order.

It is recommended that governments adopt more transparent and participatory policies, while civil society maintains peaceful and constructive forms of protest. Future research

should explore comparative cases and the role of digital activism in shaping protest dynamics.

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