

# **A Community-Based and Crisis Communication Approach to Managing Limited-Escalation Student Protests: Evidence from a Case Study in Yogyakarta**

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## **Abstract**

*This study aims to analyze the implementation of a community-based approach in managing student demonstrations that experienced limited escalation in Yogyakarta and to evaluate its effectiveness in reducing the potential for conflict. The study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design focused on the demonstration that took place in front of the Yogyakarta Regional Police Headquarters in February 2026. Data were collected through media documentation, digital observation, and literature review, and were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model. The results indicate that the community-based approach was implemented through non-repressive strategies, such as the avoidance of excessive force and the selective handling of three students who were handed over to university authorities. This approach proved capable of keeping the situation under control without triggering a broader escalation of conflict. Furthermore, community*

*involvement through the local practice of neighborhood watch played a crucial role in promoting de-escalation of the situation through community-based social control mechanisms. Theoretically, these findings reinforce the concepts of community policing and crisis communication by emphasizing the importance of collaboration, trust, and adaptive communication. The novelty of this research lies in the identification of neighborhood watch as a local form of the community approach, demonstrating that conflict management must be contextualized within the social and cultural practices of the community.*

**Keywords:** *Community Policing, Crisis Communication, Student Protests, Community Watch*

## **1. Introduction**

Student demonstrations represent an integral component of democratic life, functioning not only as a channel for expressing political aspirations but also as a form of public communication that shapes collective awareness and civic engagement (Tufekci, 2017; Zlobina et al., 2024). In contemporary contexts, the nature of collective action has been significantly transformed by digital technology, which enables rapid, decentralized mobilization through the integration of online and offline spaces (Etter & Albu, 2021). This phenomenon, often conceptualized as connective action, allows protests to emerge and expand without relying on formal organizational structures, yet it simultaneously increases the potential for situational instability due to the speed and scale of information dissemination (Donato et al., 2022). As a result, demonstrations today are not merely political events, but complex social communication processes shaped by interactions among actors, information flows, and collective emotions. This issue is increasingly important as ineffective protest management not only risks conflict escalation but also undermines public trust and institutional legitimacy in democratic societies (Cheng, 2021).

Within this evolving landscape, the escalation of demonstrations should be understood not as a binary condition between peaceful and violent action, but as a continuum of intensity that develops through situational dynamics (Busher et al., 2021). In this study, the concept of limited escalation is employed to refer to conditions in which demonstrations experience rising tension, such as minor physical disruption or confrontation, yet do not develop into widespread violence or uncontrollable riots (Carlson, 1995). This distinction is analytically important, as it prevents overgeneralization and allows for a more precise examination of protest dynamics that remain within manageable boundaries (Porta, 2020). In many cases, such escalation is triggered not

only by structural grievances but also by immediate interactions, emotional contagion, and misinterpretation among actors in the field (Budd et al., 2020).

The management of demonstrations under such conditions requires approaches that go beyond conventional repressive strategies (Ritter & Conrad, 2016). Empirical studies have consistently shown that excessive use of force tends to exacerbate conflict, weaken institutional legitimacy, and erode public trust (Meško & Hacin, 2026). In contrast, alternative approaches emphasizing collaboration, communication, and social legitimacy have gained increasing relevance in contemporary conflict management. Community policing, for instance, promotes partnership between law enforcement and the community through trust-building and participatory engagement in maintaining public order (Alehegn & Engida, 2025; Gill et al., 2017). At the same time, crisis communication provides a framework for understanding how institutions convey messages, manage public perceptions, and respond adaptively in situations characterized by uncertainty and potential escalation (Coombs, 2023; Heath & Hair, 2020).

Although both community policing and crisis communication emphasize interaction and legitimacy, they operate at different yet complementary levels (Kappeler et al., 2020). Community policing focuses on relational dynamics between institutions and society, while crisis communication emphasizes message construction, perception management, and interpretive processes that shape public response (Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2020). In this regard, effective protest management depends not only on institutional strategies but also on how communication is enacted and interpreted in real time. In the digital era, where information circulates rapidly and often without verification, communication failures can accelerate conflict escalation, whereas adaptive and transparent communication can contribute to de-escalation (Austin et al., 2012; Shen et al., 2023).

Beyond formal institutional approaches, local social practices also play a significant role in shaping conflict dynamics. In the context of Yogyakarta, the tradition of *jaga warga* represents a form of informal social control rooted in collective responsibility and cultural legitimacy (Almazy et al., 2024; Wulansari & Widayanti, 2024). Unlike community policing, which is institutionally structured, this practice emerges organically from within the community and operates through social proximity and shared norms (Dobson et al., 2025). This indicates that community-based approaches are not merely institutional strategies but are deeply embedded in local social and cultural contexts.

Despite the growing body of literature on protest management, most studies remain focused on repressive approaches or large-scale conflict escalation, with limited attention to cases characterized by limited escalation and non-repressive intervention strategies (International, 2025). Existing research also tends to examine community policing and crisis communication separately, without integrating both frameworks within a unified analytical perspective. As a result, there is a lack of empirical understanding of how these approaches interact in real-world contexts, particularly in settings where local social practices play a central role. This limitation is not only theoretical but also practical, as authorities often face challenges in managing situationally escalating protests without clear, context-sensitive, and non-repressive strategies.

The student demonstration that took place in front of the Yogyakarta Special Region Police Headquarters in February 2026 provides a relevant empirical case to address this gap. The protest initially unfolded as a peaceful expression of grievances but later developed into a situation marked by limited escalation, characterized by minor physical disruption, and heightened collective emotions. However, the situation did not escalate into a large-scale conflict. Notably, the authorities adopted a non-repressive approach by prioritizing persuasive strategies, selective intervention, and coordination with educational institutions, supported by community involvement through local social practices.

To clarify the analytical scope, this study defines effectiveness as the ability of an approach to prevent further escalation, maintain situational control, and preserve social stability without excessive use of force. Based on this framework, this study aims to analyze the application of community-based and crisis communication approaches in managing limited-escalation student protests in Yogyakarta and to evaluate their effectiveness in reducing conflict potential and maintaining social order. Accordingly, the study addresses two research questions: (1) how these approaches are implemented in practice, and (2) to what extent they are effective in controlling protest dynamics.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Research Paradigm and Design**

This study employs a constructivist qualitative paradigm, which views social reality as the result of meaning-making shaped through the interactions, experiences, and interpretations of actors (Christou, 2023). This paradigm is relevant because the management of demonstrations is influenced not only by structural factors but also by perceptions, communication, and social relations among actors in conflict situations.

The research design employed is a qualitative case study, which allows for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of student demonstrations with limited escalation within a real-world context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). This study focuses on the student demonstration in front of the Yogyakarta Special Region Police Headquarters in February 2026 as a contextually bounded system, thereby enabling a holistic analysis of the dynamics of interaction between law enforcement, students, and the public.

## **2.2. Research Location and Context**

This study was conducted in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, focusing on the student demonstration that took place in front of the Yogyakarta Regional Police Headquarters in February 2026. This case was selected because it exhibits the characteristics of limited escalation, specifically, an increase in tension that did not escalate into a large-scale conflict, as well as the implementation of a non-repressive approach that prioritized crisis communication and community-based strategies. This context provides a relevant analytical framework for understanding how communication strategies and social approaches play a role in managing the dynamics of demonstrations.

## **2.3 Research Subjects and Sampling Strategy**

The research subjects consist of key actors directly or indirectly involved in the demonstrations, namely student participants, police officers, residents in the vicinity of the demonstration sites, and relevant educational institutions or social mediators. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on criteria of direct involvement, knowledge of the events, and the ability to provide information relevant to the research objectives. To enrich the variety of perspectives, snowball sampling was also employed by expanding the network of informants through recommendations from previous participants. The number of informants was not rigidly fixed but followed the principle of data saturation that is, when the collected data began to show recurring patterns and no longer yielded new information (Guest et al., 2006) thereby ensuring the depth and adequacy of the research data.

## **2.4 Data Sources and Selection Criteria**

This study utilizes two complementary types of data sources: primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants, while secondary data was collected from various media reports, digital content, and visual archives that directly documented the student demonstrations in front of the Yogyakarta Special Region Police Headquarters in February 2026.

Secondary data sources from the media were purposively selected from approximately 15–20 online media outlets, both national and local, that were deemed to possess credibility, relevance, and consistency in reporting the same events. The media sources used include national platforms such as *tvonenews.com*, *liputan6.com*, *kumparan.com*, and *kompas.id*, *viva.co.id*, and *RCTI+*, as well as local media such as *Harian Jogja*, *Radar Jogja*, and *Sorot Jogja*. Additionally, this study also considers various other regional news portals that reported on the chronology of events, the dynamics of the unrest, and the authorities' response to the demonstrations. This multi-source approach is important because studies indicate that the success of managing mass protests is determined not only by on-the-ground actions but also by how these events are represented and communicated to the public (Barnes-proby et al., 2026).

To enhance transparency while minimizing potential selection bias, this study also included sources from institutional media, such as the Indonesian National Police through the *Tribrata News channel*, as well as various other digital platforms that present different perspectives on the same events. The selection of all media sources was based on four main criteria: the publisher's credibility, direct relevance to the event, consistency of information across sources, and the presence of cross-verification of key facts, such as the number of participants, the nature of the escalation, and the actions taken by law enforcement.

In addition to text-based data, this study also utilizes digital observations of visual content in the form of videos available on YouTube and social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. This content is used to capture the dynamics of the situation on the ground in a more contextual manner, particularly regarding interactions among actors and the forms of escalation that occur. In the digital age, the use of social media as a data source has become increasingly important because it serves as a crisis communication channel that influences public perception and responses to conflict situations (Gunderson & Macdonald, 2026). The integration of these various types of sources is expected to yield a more comprehensive reconstruction of events while strengthening the validity of the findings through a data triangulation approach, particularly in understanding the relationship between communication strategies, community-based approaches, and the dynamics of escalation during demonstrations.

## **2.5 Data Collection Techniques**

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques: semi-structured interviews, documentation, and digital observation. Interviews were used as the primary data source to explore informants' experiences

and perceptions in depth (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview guide was developed based on the frameworks of community policing and crisis communication, focusing on the dynamics of escalation, law enforcement communication strategies, student perceptions, and the role of the community in mitigating conflict. Interviews were conducted in person or online, lasting 45–90 minutes, recorded with the informants' consent, and transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy.

Documentation was used as supporting data through the analysis of media reports and digital archives to reconstruct the chronology of events and identify patterns of actor responses. The use of these documents is crucial for strengthening the analysis through data triangulation (Bowen, 2009). Digital observation was conducted by analyzing visual content from YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram to capture the contextual dynamics of the situation, including interactions among actors and forms of escalation on the ground. This approach is relevant in the context of digital crisis communication, which influences public perception of an event (Coombs, 2023; Highfield & Leaver, 2016).

## **2.6 Data Analysis Techniques**

Data analysis in this study employed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The analysis process began with data reduction to filter relevant information, followed by the presentation of data in the form of thematic matrices to facilitate the identification of patterns. Subsequently, conclusions were drawn iteratively by linking empirical findings to the theoretical framework. The analysis process was conducted through three stages of coding: open coding to identify initial themes, axial coding to link categories, and selective coding to formulate core themes that explain the research phenomena. To enhance the validity of the analysis, source triangulation was performed by comparing data from interviews, media, and digital observations, and an audit trail was established to ensure the transparency of the analysis process.

## **2.7 Data Validity**

Data validity in this study is ensured through the application of four main criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility is achieved through source triangulation and cross-verification of data among informants to ensure the consistency of findings. Dependability is ensured by systematically documenting the entire research process, allowing the study to be audited and traced (Miles et al., 2014). Confirmability is maintained through the researcher's reflexivity to minimize subjective bias in data interpretation

and ensure that findings are grounded in empirical data. Meanwhile, transferability is supported by providing rich, in-depth contextual descriptions, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings in similar contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

## 2.8. Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of research ethics. Each informant was provided with an explanation of the study's objectives, the procedures to be followed, and their rights as participants. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews, and all collected data was kept confidential to protect the informants' identities. Participation in this study was voluntary, without any pressure or coercion.

## 2.9 Research Flowchart

The research process is presented in Figure 1 to illustrate the systematic and structured stages of the study.



Figure 1. Research Flowchart

As shown in Figure 1, the research begins with the identification of the phenomenon and the formulation of the research problem, focusing on student demonstrations characterized by limited escalation in Yogyakarta. This stage establishes the analytical scope and direction of the study within a qualitative case study framework.

The next stage involves data collection through multiple sources, including media reports, relevant literature, and documentation, to obtain

comprehensive and contextual information. The collected data are then classified and reduced to filter and organize information relevant to the research focus.

Subsequently, the data are analyzed using the theoretical frameworks of community policing and crisis communication to examine patterns of interaction, communication strategies, and conflict management dynamics. The results of this analysis are then interpreted to understand the meaning and relationships among the findings.

Finally, the research concludes by drawing conclusions based on the interpreted data, which serve as answers to the research questions and provide a foundation for developing theoretical and practical implications.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Thematic Findings from the Coding Process

The data were analyzed through a systematic coding process consisting of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, which enabled the identification of patterns and relationships across data sources. Through this process, four core themes emerged that collectively explain the dynamics of protest management under conditions of limited escalation.

To ensure analytical rigor, the coding process involved iterative comparison between interview transcripts, media reports, and visual observations. Initial codes were generated to capture recurring patterns in actor behavior, communication practices, and situational responses. These codes were then grouped into broader categories and refined into core themes that reflect the underlying structure of the phenomenon. This process allowed the findings to move beyond descriptive accounts and toward a more structured interpretation of how protest dynamics were managed in practice.

**Table 1.** Thematic Findings Based on Empirical Data

No	Theme	Description	Empirical Indicators	Data Source
1	Escalation Dynamics	Manifestation of tension during the protest	Damaged fence, crowd pressure, traffic disruption	Media, Observation
2	Communication Strategy	Use of persuasive and dialogic	Negotiation attempts, absence of	Interview, Media

No	Theme	Description	Empirical Indicators	Data Source
3	Selective Intervention	interaction by authorities Controlled enforcement without excessive use of force	coercive language Detention of three participants, no mass arrests, no tear gas	Media
4	Institutional Mediation	Involvement of external actors in stabilizing the situation	Students returned to the university, in coordination with the rectorate	Interview, Media

Table 1 presents a synthesis of the thematic findings derived from the coding process, integrating evidence from interviews, media reports, and digital observations. Each theme represents a distinct yet interconnected dimension of protest management. The “Escalation Dynamics” theme captures the observable manifestations of tension at the field level, while “Communication Strategy” reflects the interactional approach adopted by law enforcement in responding to the situation. The “Selective Intervention” theme highlights the measured nature of enforcement actions, indicating restraint in the use of force. Meanwhile, “Institutional Mediation” emphasizes the role of non-state actors, particularly universities, in facilitating conflict resolution.

Taken together, these themes illustrate that the management of the protest was not driven by a single mechanism, but rather by a combination of situational dynamics, communication practices, controlled intervention, and collaborative mediation. This integrated pattern forms the empirical basis for understanding how limited escalation was maintained and subsequently de-escalated.

### 3.2 Evidence-Based Findings

#### 3.2.1 Limited Escalation Dynamics

The findings indicate that the protest reached a level of limited escalation, characterized by minor physical disturbances without developing into large-scale conflict. Media reports and visual observations confirm the presence of damaged infrastructure and temporary traffic disruption.

*“The fence was damaged, and traffic came to a standstill” (Radar Jogja, 2026)*

Despite these tensions, the situation remained under control, indicating that escalation was contained within manageable limits. This suggests that while collective pressure was present, it did not reach a threshold that triggered uncontrolled violence. The pattern reflects a bounded form of escalation in which tension emerges but is simultaneously constrained by situational control and actor responses.

### **3.2.2 Non-Repressive Communication Strategy**

Interview data show that law enforcement prioritized persuasive and dialogic communication to prevent further escalation.

*“We prioritize a persuasive approach to prevent the situation from escalating” (Interview, Police Officer)*

This approach is supported by media reports indicating the absence of aggressive crowd control measures. Rather than relying on coercion, communication was used as a primary tool to shape interaction and reduce hostility. This indicates that the management of the protest was oriented toward maintaining legitimacy and minimizing confrontation, allowing tensions to be addressed without triggering defensive or reactive behavior from participants.

### **3.2.3 Selective and Measured Intervention**

The intervention applied was selective and limited. Only three students were detained and subsequently returned to their respective universities.

*“Three students were detained and handed over to the university administration” (Kompas, 2026)*

This reflects a controlled enforcement strategy aimed at maintaining order without triggering broader conflict. The limited scope of intervention suggests that enforcement actions were carefully calibrated, targeting specific individuals rather than the collective group. Such an approach reduces the risk of escalation that often arises from indiscriminate or excessive use of force.

### **3.2.4 Institutional Mediation**

The involvement of universities as mediating actors played a significant role in stabilizing the situation. The return of students to their institutions indicates the use of informal social control mechanisms.

*“Students are being sent back to campus for counseling” (Liputan6, 2026)*

This finding highlights that protest management involves collaboration beyond formal law enforcement structures. The presence of institutional mediation provides an alternative pathway for conflict resolution, shifting the response from punitive measures toward social regulation and responsibility.

### **3.2.5 Integrated Pattern of De-escalation**

When these findings are viewed collectively, a clear pattern emerges in which escalation is managed through a combination of communication, selective intervention, and institutional mediation. These elements do not operate independently but interact dynamically to shape the overall outcome of the protest.

The evidence suggests that de-escalation was not the result of a single dominant factor, but rather a cumulative process in which each mechanism contributed to stabilizing the situation. Communication reduced immediate tension, selective intervention prevented wider conflict spread, and institutional mediation reinforced social control beyond the protest setting. This integrated pattern provides a more nuanced understanding of how limited escalation can be maintained and gradually de-escalated in practice.

### **3.3 De-escalation Process Model**

The relationship between the identified themes can be conceptualized as a sequential process of de-escalation, as illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** De-escalation Process Model

Figure 2 illustrates that de-escalation in this case did not occur instantly but developed through a gradual and interconnected process. The process began with the emergence of tension in the form of limited escalation, which created the potential for broader conflict. However, this escalation was mitigated using persuasive communication, allowing

interaction between actors to remain controlled and preventing further hostility.

As the situation evolved, selective intervention was applied in a measured manner, targeting specific individuals without triggering collective resistance. This approach helped maintain order while avoiding the risks associated with excessive force. Subsequently, institutional mediation played a stabilizing role, particularly through the involvement of universities, which provided an alternative pathway for conflict resolution outside formal law enforcement mechanisms.

Overall, the process demonstrates that de-escalation was not driven by a single action, but rather by the cumulative effect of communication, controlled intervention, and social mediation. These elements worked in combination to transform a potentially escalating situation into a stable outcome, highlighting the importance of coordinated and context-sensitive approaches in managing protest dynamics.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1 Explaining De-escalation Mechanisms**

The findings demonstrate that de-escalation in this case was not achieved through coercive force, but through the combined operation of communication strategies, selective intervention, and institutional mediation. As shown in Section 3, these elements worked sequentially and interactively, forming a structured process that limited escalation and prevented the situation from developing into broader conflict. This indicates that protest management in contemporary contexts increasingly relies on legitimacy-based approaches rather than force-based control (Gill et al., 2017; Tyler, 2003).

The emphasis on persuasive communication as an initial response played a crucial role in shaping interaction between actors and reducing immediate tension. Crisis communication theory highlights that timely, transparent, and dialogic communication can significantly influence public perception and reduce uncertainty during high-tension situations (Coombs, 2023). However, the findings also show that communication alone was not sufficient to stabilize the situation. The application of selective intervention, targeted and limited enforcement, helped prevent the spread of conflict without provoking collective resistance. This aligns with research suggesting that measured and proportionate responses are more effective in maintaining order than indiscriminate force (Ritter & Conrad, 2016).

Furthermore, the involvement of institutional actors, particularly universities, provided an alternative mechanism for conflict resolution

beyond formal policing structures. This reflects the role of informal social control in maintaining social order, where non-state actors contribute to conflict mediation and legitimacy building within (Sampson & Smith, 2021). In this case, institutional mediation functioned as a bridge between formal authority and social norms, enabling a more acceptable and less confrontational resolution process.

These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that excessive repression tends to escalate conflict, while communication-based approaches contribute to de-escalation (Coombs, 2023; Ritter & Conrad, 2016). At the same time, this study extends the literature by demonstrating that effective de-escalation is not driven by a single strategy, but by the integration of multiple mechanisms operating across different levels. In particular, the role of institutional mediation adds an important dimension that has been less emphasized in prior research on protest management.

Taken together, the results suggest that de-escalation should be understood as a multi-layered process, in which communication, controlled enforcement, and social mediation function as complementary elements rather than isolated strategies. This perspective provides a more nuanced explanation of how stability can be achieved in protest situations characterized by limited escalation.

#### 4.2 Relationship Between Communication and Escalation Control

The findings reveal that communication plays a central role in shaping actor perception and reducing tension. The relationship can be illustrated as follows:



**Figure 3.** Communication–De-escalation Relationship

The figure illustrates a sequential mechanism in which communication functions as a central driver in controlling escalation. The process begins with the implementation of a communication strategy that emphasizes dialogue, openness, and responsiveness. Such an approach contributes to the formation of perceived legitimacy, as actors interpret the

intentions of authorities as fair and procedurally just. According to legitimacy theory, perceptions of fairness and respect significantly influence compliance and reduce resistance (Tyler, 2003).

As legitimacy increases, emotional and collective tension tends to decline, creating conditions in which confrontation becomes less likely. This aligns with crisis communication perspectives, which emphasize that effective communication can reduce uncertainty and stabilize high-risk situations (Coombs, 2023). The reduction of tension subsequently leads to controlled escalation, where the situation remains manageable and does not evolve into broader conflict.

Importantly, this model demonstrates that communication is not merely a supportive element but a causal mechanism that shapes the trajectory of protest dynamics. By influencing perception, communication indirectly regulates behavior, thereby limiting escalation without the need for excessive coercion. This finding reinforces the argument that communication-based approaches, when perceived as legitimate, can function as an effective strategy for maintaining order in contentious social settings (Gill et al., 2017).

#### **4.3 Comparison with Previous Studies**

Previous studies have consistently shown that coercive or repressive approaches tend to intensify conflict, whereas communication-based strategies contribute to de-escalation (Gill et al., 2017; Ritter & Conrad, 2016). The present findings confirm this pattern, particularly in demonstrating how the absence of excessive force helped maintain situational stability.

However, this study extends prior research by introducing the role of institutional mediation as an additional explanatory dimension. While much of the existing literature focuses on state-centered mechanisms of control, the findings here show that non-state actors—specifically, universities can play a decisive role in shaping outcomes. This aligns with broader perspectives on collaborative governance and networked forms of social regulation, where multiple actors jointly contribute to conflict management (Ansell & Gash, 2008). In this sense, the findings suggest a shift from a centralized model of authority toward a more distributed model, in which legitimacy is co-produced through interaction between formal institutions and community-based actors.

Recent studies further support this shift by highlighting the increasing importance of multi-actor coordination and relational governance in managing social conflict. For instance, contemporary research on protest policing emphasizes that legitimacy is not solely constructed by state actors but is negotiated through interaction with civil society and institutional

intermediaries (Mazerolle et al., 2020). Similarly, studies on crisis and risk communication in the digital era demonstrate that trust-building and stakeholder engagement are critical in preventing escalation, particularly in contexts characterized by high public visibility and rapid information diffusion (Coombs, 2023). These findings reinforce the argument that effective protest management requires a hybrid approach that integrates formal authority with socially embedded mechanisms, thereby extending existing theoretical models toward a more relational and context-sensitive understanding of de-escalation.

#### **4.4 Alternative Explanations**

The observed de-escalation cannot be attributed solely to the strategies employed by law enforcement. Several contextual factors likely contributed to the outcome. First, the relatively moderate intensity of the protest limited the potential for large-scale escalation. Second, the characteristics of student participants who remain connected to institutional structures such as universities may have made them more responsive to mediation efforts. Third, the socio-cultural context of Yogyakarta, often characterized by strong social cohesion and normative restraint, may have facilitated conflict containment.

These factors indicate that de-escalation is inherently multi-causal, shaped by the interaction between strategic intervention and contextual conditions. This interpretation is consistent with studies emphasizing that protest dynamics are influenced by both structural and situational variables (Porta & Diani, 2006). More recent research also highlights that protest outcomes are contingent upon a combination of actor characteristics, interaction patterns, and contextual environments, rather than a single dominant variable (Earl et al., 2022). In addition, studies on crowd management suggest that escalation trajectories are highly sensitive to perceived legitimacy, group identity, and situational triggers, which interact dynamically during protest events (Drury, 2020).

Recognizing these alternative explanations is essential to avoid over-attributing outcomes to a single mechanism and to maintain analytical balance. By situating the findings within a broader constellation of influencing factors, this study acknowledges the complexity of protest dynamics and reinforces the need for context-sensitive interpretations of de-escalation processes.

#### **4.5 Theoretical Contribution**

This study proposes a conceptual framework referred to as the Hybrid De-escalation Model, which integrates three key elements: communication-based approaches, selective enforcement, and informal social mediation. Unlike conventional models that tend to prioritize a

single dominant strategy, either coercive control or communication, this framework understands de-escalation as the result of interacting mechanisms operating across different levels. The findings indicate that these elements do not function independently but work in a complementary and sequential manner in managing protest dynamics.

The primary contribution of this model lies in its ability to bridge three theoretical domains that are often treated separately: community policing, crisis communication, and informal social control. Community policing emphasizes legitimacy and public trust as the foundation of effective law enforcement (Gill et al., 2017; Tyler, 2003), while crisis communication highlights the role of transparent and dialogic interaction in reducing uncertainty and tension (Coombs, 2023). At the same time, informal social control underscores the importance of socially embedded actors in maintaining order through shared norms and relationships (Sampson & Smith, 2021). By integrating these perspectives, the model offers a more comprehensive understanding of how de-escalation can be achieved without reliance on excessive force.

Furthermore, this study contributes to broader discussions on relational and collaborative governance. The involvement of institutions such as universities demonstrates that protest management is no longer exclusively state-centered but involves intermediary actors that possess social legitimacy in the eyes of participants (Ansell & Gash, 2008). This highlights that legitimacy is not solely produced through formal authority but is co-constructed through interaction with socially embedded institutions. In this sense, the Hybrid De-escalation Model provides a more context-sensitive and integrative conceptual approach, expanding existing theoretical frameworks on policing, communication, and social regulation.

#### **4.6 Practical Implications**

The findings indicate that effective protest management should prioritize communication as the initial response, complemented by selective and proportionate intervention when necessary. In practice, early-stage dialogic engagement with clear instructions, open channels for negotiation, and visible restraint can shape perceptions of fairness and reduce the likelihood of confrontation. This is consistent with procedural justice approaches, which emphasize that perceived fairness and respectful treatment enhance compliance and cooperation (Tyler, 2003). When escalation risks increase, targeted and measured enforcement rather than indiscriminate action helps maintain order without provoking collective resistance (Ritter & Conrad, 2016).

The results also highlight the value of involving external institutions, such as universities, as mediating actors. Institutional mediation provides

an alternative pathway for conflict resolution that is often perceived as more legitimate by participants, particularly when actors have existing affiliations with those institutions. This aligns with collaborative governance perspectives, which stress the effectiveness of multi-actor coordination in addressing complex social issues (Ansell & Gash, 2008), as well as crisis communication frameworks that underline the importance of stakeholder engagement in high-risk situations (Coombs, 2023). In operational terms, this implies establishing pre-event coordination protocols between law enforcement and relevant institutions to enable rapid mediation when tensions arise.

Overall, this approach reduces the likelihood of escalation by balancing authority with dialogue and social legitimacy. For policymakers and practitioners, the findings underscore the need to adopt integrated strategies that combine formal enforcement with community-based engagement. Such strategies should be supported by clear standard operating procedures, training in communication and negotiation skills, and mechanisms for inter-institutional collaboration. By moving beyond a purely coercive model, protest management can become more adaptive, context-sensitive, and effective in maintaining social stability.

#### **4.7 Limitations**

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the use of a single-case design restricts the transferability of the findings to other contexts, particularly those with different institutional settings or socio-cultural characteristics (Yin, 2018). Second, the reliance on qualitative data, especially media reports and interview accounts, introduces potential biases related to selective reporting, framing, and interpretation (Bowen, 2009). Although triangulation was applied, the possibility of representation bias cannot be eliminated.

Third, the absence of quantitative measurement limits the ability to assess the relative influence and interaction of the identified factors. As a result, the findings are better understood as explanatory rather than predictive. In addition, the use of retrospective data may not fully capture real-time dynamics or micro-level interaction processes during the protest, which are often fluid and rapidly evolving.

Future research is therefore encouraged to adopt comparative case study designs across different regions or protest contexts to enhance external validity. Moreover, integrating mixed-method approaches combining qualitative insights with quantitative analysis would allow for more robust testing of the proposed Hybrid De-escalation Model. Such approaches could also facilitate a deeper examination of causal

mechanisms and improve the generalizability of findings within the broader field of protest and conflict management research.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study aimed to examine how community-based and crisis communication approaches are implemented in managing student protests with limited escalation in Yogyakarta, and to assess their effectiveness in maintaining situational control without excessive use of force. The findings provide a clear answer to both research questions. First, the implementation of these approaches occurs through an integrated process involving persuasive communication, selective and proportionate intervention, and institutional mediation, particularly through the involvement of universities. Second, the effectiveness of this approach is demonstrated by its ability to contain escalation within manageable limits, prevent the spread of conflict, and maintain social stability without triggering large-scale confrontation.

Beyond confirming the role of non-repressive strategies, this study offers a higher-order synthesis by showing that de-escalation is not the result of a single mechanism, but a sequential and interactive process. Communication functions to shape perceived legitimacy and reduce immediate tension, selective intervention limits the scope of enforcement without provoking collective resistance, and institutional mediation reinforces social control through socially embedded actors. This integrated pattern forms what this study conceptualizes as a Hybrid De-escalation Model, in which formal authority and informal social mechanisms operate in combination to manage protest dynamics. Importantly, this model does not claim universal applicability, but is bounded by the specific socio-cultural and institutional context of Yogyakarta.

In practical terms, the findings provide actionable implications for policymakers and practitioners. Effective protest management should prioritize early-stage dialogic communication, establish clear protocols for selective and proportionate intervention, and develop institutional partnerships, particularly with universities or community-based actors, to facilitate mediation. These strategies should be formalized through standard operating procedures, training in communication and negotiation skills, and inter-institutional coordination mechanisms. Such an approach is particularly relevant for managing protests characterized by limited escalation, where excessive force may be counterproductive.

However, the applicability of these findings is subject to important limitations. This study is based on a single-case qualitative design and relies on triangulated data from interviews, media reports, and digital

observation. While this approach allows for in-depth contextual analysis, it limits generalizability and does not permit causal measurement of the relative influence of each factor. Furthermore, the reliance on mediated data sources may introduce representation bias, despite efforts to ensure cross-verification. These constraints mean that the findings should be interpreted as contextually grounded explanations rather than generalizable causal claims, thereby avoiding the overgeneralization noted in the earlier version of this manuscript.

Based on these limitations, future research should move beyond single-case analysis by conducting comparative studies across different regions and protest contexts, particularly those with varying levels of escalation and institutional capacity. Additionally, future studies should adopt mixed method designs that combine qualitative process tracing with quantitative measurement to test the relative impact of communication strategies, enforcement patterns, and mediation mechanisms. More specifically, further research is needed to examine (1) how perceived legitimacy mediates the relationship between communication and protest behavior, (2) how institutional mediation varies across different socio-political contexts, and (3) how digital communication environments influence escalation dynamics in real time.

At a theoretical level, this study contributes to the literature on community policing, crisis communication, and informal social control by demonstrating that effective protest management requires an integrative and relational framework, rather than isolated strategies. It extends existing theories by highlighting the role of intermediary institutions in co-producing legitimacy and stabilizing conflict situations. In this sense, the study does not propose a universal paradigm shift, but rather offers a context-sensitive analytical model that may inform future research and practice in similar settings.

Overall, this study demonstrates that managing protests with limited escalation requires approaches that are adaptive, context-aware, and grounded in social interaction. The findings underscore that stability is not achieved solely through control, but through the alignment of communication, legitimacy, and social mediation within a specific socio-cultural context.

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