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Psychological Distress Due to Political Demonstrations in Indonesia's Democracy

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Abstrak

Demonstrasi politik dalam beberapa tahun terakhir telah menjadi fenomena yang signifikan di Indonesia, karena tidak hanya mencerminkan ketidakstabilan politik tetapi juga menimbulkan gangguan psikologis massal, yang jarang diakui sebagai bagian dari keadaan darurat sosial. Studi sebelumnya cenderung fokus pada masalah struktural seperti krisis legitimasi negara, polarisasi elit, atau kelemahan institusi demokratis, namun tidak melihat demonstrasi sebagai pemicu trauma kolektif, erosi kepercayaan publik, dan gangguan emosional. Untuk mengisi kekosongan tersebut, studi ini menganalisis bagaimana demonstrasi politik menyebabkan darurat psikologis melalui trauma sosial, ketidakpercayaan terhadap negara, dan gangguan emosional akibat kondisi media dan ekonomi. Untuk menjawab hal ini, digunakan analisis konten kualitatif terhadap 15 laporan berita daring nasional dan regional dari 1-31 Agustus 2025 dengan teknik pengkodean tematik. Penelitian ini menemukan tiga hal utama, yaitu trauma kolektif yang muncul akibat kekerasan oleh pihak berwenang, korban jiwa, dan hilangnya rasa aman, krisis kepercayaan terhadap institusi negara yang terlihat dalam penolakan kebijakan, kritik moral, dan tuntutan pembubaran DPR, serta peningkatan gangguan psikologis akibat paparan media, pemutusan hubungan kerja, dan tekanan ekonomi. Kontribusi penelitian ini terletak pada reposisi demonstrasi sebagai pemicu gangguan psikologis kolektif, bukan hanya sebagai ekspresi politik. Studi ini merekomendasikan agar negara mengadopsi pendekatan yang lebih empati dengan menerapkan kebijakan pendukung, perlindungan psikososial, dan jalur partisipatif yang tidak traumatis.

Kata kunci: Darurat Psikologi, Demonstrasi Politik, Demokrasi Indonesia, Erosi Kepercayaan Masyarakat, Trauma Kolektif

1. INTRODUCTION

The rise in political demonstrations over the past ten years is closely linked to a shift in Indonesia, where mass actions have evolved from a platform for political expression to a catalyst for psychological crises. Growing social and political pressure has transformed public spaces into not only venues for free expression but also sources of collective anxiety. The oppressive actions of authorities and the state's inability to address the public's needs have heightened frustration and mistrust among the populace. (Bednarczyk, 2024; Rahimi & Rezaei, 2025; Smart, 2025). Empirical evidence indicates that significant protests, like the backlash against the Jos Creation Law, led to injuries, widespread arrests, and lasting psychological trauma (Gajardo et al., 2022; U.S.

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Department of State, 2024). Other reports highlight that the effects of the protests went beyond just material consequences; they also deeply affected people's mental well-being, leading to anxiety and a loss of public confidence (Bernardi, 2021; Karmila et al., 2024). As such, political demonstrations not only impact stability but also create a psychological crisis that endangers the fabric of our society.

Research on political demonstrations has often concentrated on structural issues like legitimacy crises, elite divides, and fragile democratic institutions. However, this study emphasizes the importance of political dynamics while often overlooking the psychological impacts on society. In fact, international literature reveals that mass participation in protest can lead to collective trauma, moral injury, and ongoing anxiety disorders (Levi-Belz et al., 2023; Li et al., 2021). In Indonesia, most research has primarily focused on adolescent mental health or the psychological toll of the pandemic (Astutik & Dewi, 2022; Sulistiowati et al., 2019; Wiguna et al., 2020). Very few studies have directly connected political demonstrations to psychological emergencies, although these events can leave lasting collective scars. This gap highlights the urgent need to explore the relationship between demonstrations, psychological trauma, and social crises in Indonesia.

This paper aims to offer a fresh perspective by viewing political demonstrations not just as political events but also as a catalyst for psychological crises within society. The goal is to address the gaps in previous research by analyzing the collective trauma, social anxiety, and erosion of public trust that stem from these demonstrations. Specifically, this study seeks to explore how political protest in Indonesia triggers psychological trauma in communities and to what extent they can be seen as a psychological emergency within the framework of contemporary democracy. This inquiry is crucial for determining the need for community-focused socio-political interventions that can help mitigate the psychological effects of such protests.

This article contends that political demonstrations in Indonesia are more than just expressions of dissent; they also carry a significant psychological impact. The shrinking spaces for public participation, along with economic inequality and government repression, create various pressures that can lead to social trauma, increased political division, and a widespread crisis of confidence (Pettas & Daskalaki, 2022; Zúñiga et al., 2023). Empirical evidence reveals that the psychological well-being of Indonesians is quite fragile and can be deeply affected by significant events. This is reflected in the high rates of mental health issues stemming from social and political stress (Djuyandi et al., 2023; Proust & Saldaña, 2022). Global literature also confirms that protracted protests without substantive resolution leave psychological scars in the form of PTSD and moral injury (Levi-Belz et al., 2023; Li et al., 2021). Therefore, the initial hypothesis of this paper is that the intensity of demonstrations without an empathetic policy response will only increase the risk of a psychological emergency forming in a democratic society.

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW
Psychological Emergency

Psychological emergency refers to a state of mental distress that arises when individuals or groups ar exposed to extreme collective stress, such as political conflict or demonstration, thus disrupting their perception system, social bonds, and mental well-being (Locatelli et al., 2022). This tension is actualised through collective trauma, namely shared experiences of state violence or repression that cause long-term symptoms of PTSD, depression, and social dysfunction (Kahraman & Kına, 2024). In the context of Indonesian democracy, the crisis of trust in political institutions, especially parties and parliament, has declined dramatically, leaving empty expectations and vulnerability to disillusionment, which exacerbates public psychological distress amid political and economic pressures (Suryahadi et al., 2023). Moreover, psychological disorders resulting from economic and political instability, such as education budget cuts and populist policies that harm vulnerable groups, trigger chronic anxiety and social uncertainty, worsening the mental condition of a society already burdened by structural injustice (Mattheys, 2015).

The concept of psychological distress in political demonstrations can be evaluated through three main categories, namely individual, social, and structural aspects. At the individual level, symptoms such as chronic anxiety, insomnia, and post-demonstration trauma are identified as affective responses to exposure to violence (Covey et al., 2020). At the social scale, the disruption of collective bonds gives rise to horizontal and vertical distrust, which weakens community cohesion and reduces political participation (Krakowski, 2020). At the structural scale, policy injustices, state repression, and the legitimacy deficit of democratic institutions exacerbate the mental condition of the community (Friedman & Gostin, 2015). Empirical evidence from Indonesia shows that post-riot psychosocial support programmes successfully reduced anxiety levels and restored community solidarity, underscoring the importance of community-based interventions in responding to psychological emergencies (Larson-Stoa et al., 2015)

2.1 Political Demonstration

Political demonstrations are defined as a phenomenon of collective mobilisation that arises from structural friction within democracy, where economic pressure and political legitimacy crises are the main triggers of tension between social actors in the form of mass action, based on theories such as social identity theory and collective trauma (Loh, 2023). Demonstrations are not only a manifestation of political demands, but also a space for expressing the collective trauma of political violence and repression experienced by individuals and groups, leaving long-term psychological scars such as anxiety, hypervigilance, and a crisis of trust in society at large (Gunawan, 2024). In the Indonesian context, further studies have found that the trauma following the May 1998 riots has exacerbated identity fragmentation and triggered distortions in the sense of togetherness and trust, with the effects of trauma even extending to the second and third

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generations (Himawan et al., 2022). Meanwhile, a global systematic review found that after demonstrations or riots, the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) reached up to 41%, while depression also increased by about 7% in affected communities, even among those not directly involved, demonstrating a clear psychological spillover effect (Ni et al., 2020).

An evaluation of political demonstrations within the framework of social psychology shows that collective trauma can be categorised into three main dimensions, namely historical memory, social identity, and perceptions of contemporary threats, which reinforce each other in producing psychological distress (Sanchez, 2022). The aspect of social identity plays an important role because group attachment often mediates experiences of violence, increasing solidarity but at the same time increasing the risk of polarisation and a crisis of trust in democratic institutions (Törnberg et al., 2021). In the case of Indonesia, studies on the legacy of political unrest found that psychological distress was higher among minority groups directly exposed to violence, indicating an interaction between structural factors and cultural identity (Suryana, 2019). Another example is shown in comparative research in Southeast Asia, where political legitimacy crises exacerbate symptoms of collective depression expressed through distrust of elections and state institutions (Chang et al., 2013).

2.2 Indonesian Democracy

Indonesian democracy refers to a constitutional system of government that places sovereignty in the hands of the people, as enshrined in the 1945 UUD, which guarantees the involvement of the people through representation and deliberation as well as the enforcement of the rule of law (people's sovereignty and checks and balances) (Wisnaeni & Herawati, 2020). The concept of Pancasila democracy, as an ideological foundation, combines universal democratic values with local culture, highlighting plurality, deliberation to reach consensus, and social justice as the basis of Indonesia's unique political system (Nurdin et al., 2023). This model operates within the framework of electoral democracy, which is consolidated through institutions such as the Constitutional Court and multiparty presidential elections (Eddyono, 2018). However, Indonesian democracy is often criticised as majoritarian democracy, which tends to suppress diversity and lead to human rights violations in the name of political stability for the majority (Laksana, 2017). Moreover, during Joko Widodo's leadership, a number of studies have pointed to signs of autocratisation, in which democratic institutions have deteriorated due to the dominance of the old elite and oligarchic practices (Taufik et al., 2023). Although democratic progress has been made since the 1998 Reform, the process has stagnated and faced threats since the 2010s, due to a shift towards a compromised model of democracy that maintains elite dominance in politics and the economy (Muslimin & Putri, 2021).

Conceptually, research on Indonesian democracy in the contemporary era focuses on philosophical, institutional, and contextual categories as the three main dimensions of

analysis. In the philosophical-normative realm, studies evaluating the application of Pancasila values in legal policy reveal inconsistencies between the value foundation and regulatory practice, as well as a lack of strategic public participation(Setya et al., 2023). Moreover, it highlights the challenges of Pancasila democracy in the digital age, with an evaluative approach showing that technology widens the gap between political identities and disinformation and weakens deliberative consensus (Piccone, 2018). Another normative study (Hangabei et al., 2021) describes Pancasila as a social and philosophical control norm amid a power structure that has the potential to reduce democratic practices through inequality and the degradation of positive law. Meanwhile, (Sudrajat, 2018) highlights the fundamental role of Pancasila values in developing human rights awareness, emphasising the reduction of majority domination and the importance of normative legitimacy of individual rights in democratic governance.

3. METHOD

The unit of analysis in this study is the narrative and content of online news coverage of political demonstrations in Indonesia throughout 2025, focusing on the psychological impacts that arise from these events. Demonstrations are understood not merely as expressions of political aspirations but as social events that generate psychological distress and influence the way people interpret security, state legitimacy, and social stability. The analysis focuses on the representation of collective trauma, social anxiety, a crisis of public trust, and political polarization as consequences of democratic instability. Online media is positioned as a representation space that records public emotions, victims' experiences, and symbolic constructions of political conflict in the digital realm (Abtahi et al., 2022; Lam & Chan, 2024; Rutten et al., 2013; Yang et al., 2021). Thus, the unit of analysis not only documents events but also reads how psychological impacts are interpreted, produced, and disseminated in the public sphere.

This research uses a qualitative approach with a content analysis method to interpret the data contextually and in depth. The choice of this method allows for the exploration of the relationship between political escalation and collective psychological pressure, manifesting as fear, uncertainty, loss of security, and a decline in trust in state institutions. This approach also provides space to capture psychological symptoms that are not directly visible but are recorded through media narratives, sources' perspectives, and news framing. Thus, demonstrations are understood as social experiences that can trigger stress, frustration, emotional exhaustion, and threaten social cohesion and psychological resilience (Kırseven & Işıklı, 2020). The analysis focuses on how demonstrations transform into psychological emergencies that challenge democracy's capacity to protect citizens' mental well-being.

The research data were obtained from national and regional media portals that reported on political demonstrations in Indonesia during the period August 1-31, 2025. The collection was done through intensive searches using keywords such as "Indonesian political demonstrations", "psychological trauma", "crisis of public confidence", and

"socio-political polarization". News selection was done systematically based on headlines, narratives, photos, and content relevant to the research focus. From this process, 15 articles were obtained and analyzed. Online media is not only treated as a source of information, but also as an arena of representation where political conflicts are symbolically and psychologically constructed (Bliuc et al., 2021). Narratives circulating in the digital space reflect emotional disruption, public frustration, and psychological distance between society and state institutions.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which included coding, theme identification, and review to ensure context relevance. From the selection results, three main categories emerged, namely collective trauma and social anxiety, crisis of trust in political institutions, and community polarization. These three categories became the analytical framework for mapping the relationship between political events and their accompanying psychological impacts. The analysis process follows the model of (Miles & Huberman, 2014). The data were organized in the form of narratives and matrices so that the patterns of connection between themes could be read clearly and systematically. The data is organized in the form of narratives and matrices so that the patterns of connection between themes can be read clearly and systematically. Through this approach, the research seeks to explain how political demonstrations escalate into collective mental distress and how democracy responds to the psychological burden of society. The results of the analysis are expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychological crisis as a structural consequence of prolonged political conflict.

4. RESULT

Political instability in recent years has not only affected the constitutional and institutional dimensions of the state, but has also produces profound psychological consequences for society. Large-scale demonstrations, repressive responses by security forces, and the constant circulation of conflict-related news have created a climate of sustained fear and uncertainty. People are not merely observers of political events, but direct subjects of emotional strain that develops into collective trauma. Incidents involving casualties, material destruction, and disruption of daily activities further erode a sense of safety in public life. In this context, examining how political violence systematically and persistently impacts mental health becomes an urgent necessity.

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Collective Trauma from Political Violence

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Table 4. 1

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No	Data	Figure	Description	Sources
1	Collective trauma, fear of political conflict		The wave of demonstrations that broke out in various cities took its toll.	https://shorturl.at/krzkE
2	Shock, public surprise, and anxiety about the authorities		The tragedy that sparked the most public outrage was when an online motorcycle taxi driver was killed by a police vehicle during a demonstration.	https://shorturl.at/VgYtq
3	Prolonged stress in society.		According to official reports, over 700 people were injured, and the damage to infrastructure and property amounted to $3.4 million. This underscores the significant psychological and physical toll of these events	https://shorturl.at/tOfCm
4	Widespread anxiety and insecurity in daily life		The protests led to early school closures, and the public, including workers, were encouraged to consider the uncertain circumstances and concern for public safety	https://shorturl.at/pn8um
5	Erosion of security in democracy.		The protests were not limited to Jakarta; the events spread to several major cities, creating emotional distress and widespread fear in the community.	https://shorturl.at/TDbRP

This table shows five main pieces of evidence of the psychological emergency that emerged from the political demonstrations in Indonesia. First, the wave of protest that resulted in fatalities heightened feelings of collective trauma and fear of political conflict, leaving lasting scars on society. Second, the tragic death of an online motorcycle taxi driver, struck by a police vehicle, shocked the community, sparking anger and deepening anxiety about the safety of state security institutions. Third, the community faced ongoing stress as more than 700 people were reported injured, and the damage to

infrastructure amounted to millions of dollars, reflecting significant psychological and material impacts. Fourth, anxiety and insecurity grew as schools closed early and workers were encouraged to work from home, highlighting a troubling lack of stability in everyday life. Fifth, the decline in feelings of security within the democratic framework became evident with the rise of protests in major cities, leading to widespread emotional distress and fear among the public.

From the five characteristics of psychological emergency presented in the table, three important contexts can be explained. First, the collective trauma and public shock extend beyond just the loss of life; the tragic death of an online motorcycle taxi driver intensifies them. This incident underscores the tensions between the community and authorities, reinforcing a repressive image of state institutions and instilling a lasting sense of fear among the public. Second, the layered stress and anxiety experienced by thousands of injured individuals, combined with material losses and emergency measures like school closures and work-from-home recommendations, demonstrate how the pandemic and rural communities are infiltrating the domestic sphere. Third, the erosion of democratic security suggests that instead of fostering public participation, political demonstrations are creating psychological emergencies that threaten social cohesion. As a result, these demonstrations in Indonesia have shifted from being a platform for political engagement to becoming a source of collective psychological distress.

Crisis of Public Trust in Democracy

Table 4.2

No	Data	Figure	Description	Sources
1	The emergence of distrust of legislative institutions	Kompilasi Pernyataan DPR soal Kenaikan Tunjangan yang Memicu Demonstrasi dan Tewaskan Affan	Public demand "dissolve the DPR" and ask for the cancellation of allowances	https://shorturl.at/uzxIn
2	Fueling cynicism and structural injustice	Polemik Tunjangan DPR Dalam Perspektif Komunikasi Politik	There is economic disparity, as a housing allowance of Rp 50 million is provided, while laborers receive Rp 3 million.	https://shorturl.at/13OJR

3	Diminishing the moral legitimacy of political elites		Failed political communication, lack of empathy from the DPR. Critics from the academic community say the policy reflects a failure of empathy and social sensitivity from the DPR towards the conditions of the people.	https://shorturl.at/cDlpR
4	Democracy demands accountability and openness from leaders		The Pati community's action against the PBB-P2 increase of up to 250% shows a crisis of confidence in local government, triggered by burdensome policies and a lack of transparency.	https://shorturl.at/DynVg
5	Loss of trust in Parliament, government, and police.		The people's crisis of confidence in the DPR government and police is due to weak legislative, budgetary, and supervisory functions. Political observers believe that restoring trust requires passing a pro-people bill (the asset seizure bill), protecting freedom of expression, and ensuring the professionalism of the apparatus in handling mass actions without repression.	https://shorturl.at/hNrdo

This table shows five key pieces of evidence that illustrate the loss of public trust and socio-political polarization in Indonesia. First, public demands to "dissolve the DPR" and cancel allowances symbolize distrust of the legislature. Second, cynicism has emerged due to structural injustice, with the gap between the DPR's allowance of Rp 50 million and a laborer's salary of only Rp 3 million sharpening social tensions. Thirdly, the moral legitimacy of the political elite has faded due to failed communication and a lack of empathy, as criticized by academics. Fourth, a democracy that rejects the PBB-P2 increase of up to 250% as a form of crisis of confidence in local government. Fifth, the crisis of confidence extends to the DPR, the government, and the police apparatus, which are considered to have failed in their supervisory and budgetary functions. This situation emphasizes that public trust can only be restored through pro-people policies, protection of civil liberties, and professionalism of the apparatus.

From the five pieces of evidence presented, three main contexts deepen the crisis of public confidence: the calls to dissolve the DPR, the cynicism caused by sharp social disparities, and other factors. The DPR's allowances, which contrast with the income of laborers, show the distance between the political elite and the reality of the people. Second, the moral legitimacy of the political elite has been eroded by failed communication and the absence of empathy. Academic criticism confirms that the DPR's allowance policy is not limited to the DPR but also extends to local government and law enforcement officials. Pati's protest against the PBB-P2 hike exposes the failure of policy

transparency, while observers argue that recovery is only possible through institutional reforms that favor the people. Thus, the evidence suggests that the loss of public trust in Indonesian democracy is not just a political phenomenon, but also a psychological emergency that threatens social cohesion.

Increased Psychological Distress due to Exposure to Political Demonstration News

Table 4.3

No	Data	Figure	Description	Source
1	Political instability in 2025 triggers a spike in mental disorders among Indonesians.		The massive demonstrations on August 25, 2025, in many cities in Indonesia triggered an increase in anxiety, stress, and a decline in mental health in the community.	https://shorturl.at/QmBo5
2	Political elites are asked to be sensitive, as people are increasingly depressed, and the gap widens.		People affected by layoffs, economic pressures, and declining savings deposits felt severe stress. Economic injustice compared to political elite perks triggers frustration and psychological distress	https://shorturl.at/uhuF3
3	The wave of demonstrations in Indonesia is considered the result of failed economic policies.		The demonstrations became more intense due to policies that failed to address the root causes of the economy, such as fiscal inequality, budget transparency, and labor welfare issues, which particularly affected online motorcycle taxi drivers. These frustrations trigger public anxiety and uncertainty that continue to disrupt the psychological stability of many people.	https://shorturl.at/4efl2
4	Sritex mass layoffs, 8504 employees lose their jobs		Psychological impacts are noted as public concern, stress, insecurity, hopelessness, loss of income, or the pressure of poverty, which can trigger mental disorders.	https://shorturl.at/AIdDD
5	Distressed communities, when reading bad news about		This phenomenon shows that intense exposure to political information in an open democracy can trigger collective psychological distress, especially among young people and urban workers.	https://shorturl.at/WsAD5

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The table presents five key pieces of evidence that link political instability and economic stress to the rise in psychological disorders among Indonesians. First, the large demonstrations on August 25, 2025, that took place in various cities triggered a spike in anxiety, stress, and a decline in mental health. Second, economic stress from layoffs, declining savings, and welfare inequality, in comparison to the benefits enjoyed by the political elite, caused severe frustration and psychological distress among the people. Third, the wave of demonstrations is seen as the impact of failed economic policies that do not address the root of the problem, such as fiscal inequality, budget transparency, and labor welfare. This is particularly affecting online motorcycle taxi drivers, giving rise to public anxiety and uncertainty. Fourth, mass layoffs at the Sritex company that caused 8,504 employees to lose their jobs led to insecurity, stress, and hopelessness that could potentially develop into mental disorders. Fifth, constant exposure to bad political news creates collective psychological distress, especially among young people and urban workers in open democracies.

From these five pieces of evidence, at least three main trends clarify the relationship between socio-political instability and people's psychological state. First, political demonstrations and unresponsive public policies have created mass emotional distress, where political uncertainty and unrest lead to collective anxiety. Second, economic factors have become a significant trigger for psychological distress, primarily through job cuts, fiscal inequality, and unequal welfare comparisons between the people and the elite. Third, overexposure to negative political information accelerates the formation of mental fatigue, frustration, and a sense of helplessness, especially among young people and urban workers. In addition, mass layoff cases such as Sritex show that loss of income is not only an economic problem, but also a threat to an individual's sense of security and self-worth. Overall, society's psychological crisis is not only triggered by political events but also exacerbated by an economic structure and information ecosystem that imposes a constant mental burden on the public.

5. DISCUSSION

The main findings of this study indicate that political demonstrations in Indonesia have developed into a form of psychological emergency that encompasses three key dimensions: collective trauma, crisis of trust, and psychological distress. These three dimensions do not appear separately, but are interconnected and form a pattern of systemic emotional disturbance. Trauma arises from social wounds and a loss of security due to violence by the authorities, loss of life, and damage to public facilities. The crisis of confidence is reflected in the delegitimization of the House of Representatives, criticism of the corrupt elite, and rejection of policies that are considered unfair. Psychological distress increases through exposure to intense news coverage of demonstrations, economic pressure, and political uncertainty, which is felt most acutely by urban workers, the younger generation, and vulnerable groups. These findings indicate that demonstrations no longer function solely as political expression, but have entered the

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realm of public emotion and transformed Indonesia's democratic space into an arena of psychological threat.

In the context of post-reform Indonesia, demonstrations are not only a reaction to policy, but a reflection of structural tensions between the state and its citizens. The legacy of authoritarianism, economic uncertainty, and distorted political communication create a fertile environment for psychological emergencies. Global literature places protests as a trigger for social trauma (Irshad, 2024; Levi-Belz et al., 2023; Li et al., 2021). However, the case of Indonesia shows a different dynamic: the main threat does not come solely from horizontal clashes between citizens, but from fear of state authority and uncertainty over policy direction. The national media reinforces this situation through reports that emphasize violence, conflict, and state failure, creating a perception of widespread threat. Thus, demonstrations in Indonesia need to be understood within a political landscape marked by power imbalances, cynicism toward state institutions, and public communication that fails to build a sense of psychological security for citizens.

Interpretation of the findings shows that these three forms of psychological emergency form a series of public emotions: trauma, distrust, distress. From a political psychology perspective, this series reflects the collapse of the emotional contract between the state and its citizens. Collective trauma not only takes the form of memories of violence, but also develops into an anticipation of fear of state apparatus. The crisis of trust shows that citizens view political institutions as entities that no longer protect public morality, giving rise to political alienation (Fernando et al., 2024; Ma'shumah, 2021). Psychological distress reinforces the two previous conditions through information fatigue, economic anxiety, and a loss of control. The interaction of these three elements shows that demonstrations serve as both a trigger and a mirror of democratic dysfunction, where the public sphere, which should be an arena for deliberation, has become a source of emotional threat. Thus, the psychological emergency reflects political tensions rooted in the state's failure to provide psychological security for its citizens.

Conceptually, these findings expand our understanding of the psychology of democracy, particularly how collective emotions serve as indicators of a country's political health. The findings show that public trauma, crises of trust, and distress are not only psychological phenomena, but also indicators of democratic vulnerability. In the physical realm, the disruption of daily activities and the increase in political violence indicate a breakdown in environmental safety (Seo et al., 2021; Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou, 2022). In the social realm, patterns of collective withdrawal signify a weakening of social cohesion due to fear. In the ideological realm, cynicism towards the state signifies a decline in the moral legitimacy of public institutions (Brady & Kent, 2022; Cohen-Eliya & Porat, 2025). These findings enrich the discourse of social and political psychology by showing that the greatest threat to democracy is not always a coup or open conflict, but rather the accumulation of psychological wounds that erode people's trust, sense of security, and emotional resilience.

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Compared to previous studies, these findings make an important contribution because they reveal patterns that have not been identified in local studies. Global research on moral injury and protest trauma (Irshad, 2024; Levi-Belz et al., 2023) has largely emphasized the effects of direct conflict, while this study found that in Indonesia, trauma also arises from structural fear of state authority and policy uncertainty. Unlike the research by Wiguna, Astutik & Dewi, which focuses on adolescent mental health and the pandemic, this study identifies a logical relationship between demonstrations, political delegitimization, and emotional distress. While (Ulum, 2020; Yavetz & Vasiliu, 2024) highlight the function of demonstrations as a channel for frustration, this study shows how that frustration develops into a psychological emergency with dimensions of trauma and alienation. Thus, this study expands the knowledge base by adding an emotional-political dimension that has not been widely discussed in Indonesian literature.

To prevent psychological emergencies from developing into deeper social and political crises, a transformation in the state's approach to demonstrations is needed. The most urgent step is to replace repressive responses with policies that are empathetic, communicative, and prioritize the psychological safety of citizens. The state needs to rebuild its legitimacy through budget transparency, professionalism of officials, and public policies that protect the welfare of the community. From the media's perspective, an alternative narrative is needed to reduce public anxiety not exacerbate it through proportional and non-sensational reporting. Civil society can strengthen citizens' emotional resilience through political education, community advocacy, and safe channels of participation. In the long term, building a healthy democracy requires restoring the emotional contract between the state and its citizens. With this model, demonstrations can once again become a constructive democratic mechanism, rather than a source of mass trauma. The findings of this study confirm that democracy can only survive if it also protects the psychological health of the public.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that political demonstrations in Indonesia are not only an arena for political expression, but also produce systemic psychological emergencies. The three main phenomena identified are collective trauma due to violence and uncertainty, a crisis of trust in state institutions, and psychological distress triggered by media exposure and economic pressure. They are intertwined and show that demonstrations have shifted from a political practice to a source of emotional threat, especially when symbolic violence, a lost sense of security, and the moral delegitimization of the state go together. As such, political demonstrations are not only symptoms of instability, but also generators of mass psychic distress.

Theoretically, this study expands the understanding of the relationship between political protest, social injury, and psychological crisis. While previous literature has emphasized trauma due to physical clashes or the global context, this study reinterprets it by showing that fear of the authorities, policy empathy deficits, and media disinformation

are the main structures that produce collective distress. Practically, this study emphasizes the urgency of building a model of handling demonstrations based on psychosocial protection, improving state political communication, and providing safe and non-traumatic aspiration channels. Alternative narratives from civil society and the media are crucial in reducing anxiety and creating an emotionally healthy democratic space.

This research has limitations in that it relies on secondary data and has not involved the direct psychological experiences of victims. The absence of field data means the analysis has not captured the details of demographic variations, locality, or expressions of trauma in marginalized groups. For this reason, further research needs to be conducted through ethnographic, psychosocial, or mixed methods approaches involving demonstration survivors, authorities, and affected communities. In addition, the role of digital media, changes in young people's perceptions, and post-riot social healing strategies should be further investigated. With further exploration, studying the psychological emergency caused by demonstrations can make a more substantive contribution to public policy, the emotional security of citizens, and the sustainability of democracy.

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