



## Media framing and the legitimation of repressive and persuasive policing in protest movements: A gamson–modigliani and rsa–isa analysis

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### Abstract

In contemporary democracies, the legitimacy of protest and state authority is increasingly shaped not only through direct confrontation but through mediated discourse, raising critical questions about how meaning, power, and control are constructed in the public sphere. This study reconceptualizes media framing as an ideological mechanism that actively produces and stabilizes state legitimacy by examining representations of repressive and persuasive policing in protest coverage. Drawing on an integrated framework combining framing theory with Althusser's concepts of Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatus, this research employs a qualitative critical interpretive approach to analyze 24 news articles from leading Indonesian online media during protests surrounding the revision of the Corruption Eradication Commission Law and the Draft Criminal Code. The findings reveal a systematic discursive pattern in which demonstrations are reframed from democratic expressions into problems of disorder, privileging narratives of conflict while marginalizing political grievances. Within this structure, the police are consistently constructed as legitimate protectors, whereas demonstrators are positioned as sources of instability through delegitimizing language, visual cues, and causal narratives. The study further demonstrates how external actors are strategically invoked to explain violence and how persuasive policing is discursively framed as ineffective, thereby normalizing the transition toward coercive intervention. These results challenge the conventional view of media as neutral intermediaries and establish framing as a structural site where ideology and coercion converge. By advancing a critical synthesis of framing and state theory, this study contributes a novel conceptual perspective to global scholarship on media and power, demonstrating that legitimacy is dynamically produced through discursive alignment rather than inherently possessed by state institutions.

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## INTRODUCTION

Across contemporary democracies, protest movements have increasingly become mediated events in which legitimacy is not only contested in the streets but also constructed within the media arena. Demonstrations are no longer solely physical acts of dissent but are simultaneously symbolic struggles over meaning, representation, and authority. In this process, the media occupies a central position in shaping how protests are understood, interpreted, and evaluated by the public. Rather than merely transmitting information, media institutions actively organize reality through selective emphasis, narrative construction, and ideological positioning (Martinisi, 2026; Yusnaini et al., 2025). These processes influence which actors are perceived as legitimate and which are framed as threats to social order. Consequently, media framing plays a decisive role in defining the boundaries of acceptable political expression. This indicates that the meaning of protest is not inherent but produced through discursive practices embedded within media systems.

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Recent protest events across different regions have demonstrated how state authority and civil resistance are negotiated not only through direct confrontation but also through mediated representation. In Indonesia, the demonstrations surrounding the revision of the Corruption Eradication Commission Law and the Draft Criminal Code illustrate how tensions between protesters and law enforcement are amplified through media narratives. These protests were characterized by a combination of repressive measures, such as the use of force, and persuasive strategies, including negotiation and public appeals by the police. However, media coverage often prioritized images of conflict, disorder, and escalation, while the substantive political demands of demonstrators were marginalized. Similar patterns have been observed in global contexts, including the coverage of Black Lives Matter protests and political unrest in Hong Kong, where media narratives frequently shift attention from structural grievances to issues of public order (Baranauskas, 2022; Harlow & Bachmann, 2024). Such representations raise critical questions about the role of media in shaping public perceptions of legitimacy. They suggest that media framing does not merely reflect reality but actively reconstructs it in ways that may favor certain power structures.

The urgency of examining this phenomenon lies in its implications for democratic life and the exercise of state power. Policing in protest contexts inherently involves a tension between safeguarding public order and respecting the right to dissent. While persuasive approaches are often presented as normative and desirable, the escalation of protests frequently leads to the justification of repressive measures. When media narratives consistently portray repression as a necessary response to disorder, they contribute to the normalization of coercive practices within democratic systems (Hasan & Al-Zaman, 2026; Sablina, 2026). This normalization can reshape public expectations, leading audiences to perceive state violence as rational, inevitable, or even justified. At the same time, protest movements risk being delegitimized as sources of instability rather than expressions of democratic participation. These dynamics reveal a deeper structural issue concerning how legitimacy is constructed and contested. Therefore, understanding media framing is essential for critically examining the relationship between power, discourse, and democracy.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study builds on the intersection between framing theory and critical state theory to analyze how meaning and power are intertwined. Framing theory conceptualizes media as producers of interpretive packages that structure how events are understood (Cobo et al., 2026; Roslyng & Dindler, 2023a), while Althusser's distinction between Repressive State Apparatuses and Ideological State Apparatuses provides a framework for analyzing how power operates through both coercion and ideology (Kadri, 2023; Paraná et al., 2026). The police, as part of the repressive apparatus, exercise physical control, whereas the media, as part of the ideological apparatus, shape perception and consent. However, these domains are not independent; rather, they function in a mutually reinforcing relationship. In protest coverage, media framing can operate as a mechanism that symbolically legitimizes the actions of coercive institutions. This creates a paradox in which democratic communication channels simultaneously sustain structures of control. Such a perspective challenges the assumption that media and state power operate in separate spheres. Instead, it suggests that they are structurally interconnected in the production of legitimacy.

A growing body of recent scholarship has examined media framing, protest dynamics, and policing practices across diverse contexts. Studies have consistently found that protest coverage tends to emphasize conflict, violence, and disruption, often at the expense of substantive political issues (Culver & McLeod, 2023; Proust & Saldaña, 2022). Research on police legitimacy further indicates that media narratives play a critical role in shaping public perceptions of state authority, particularly when police actions are framed as responses to perceived threats (Asad & Zia, 2025; Bonner & Dammert, 2022). Other studies have explored protest policing strategies, highlighting the interplay between coercion and negotiation in managing crowds (Fernandes & Silva, 2024; Stott et al., 2026). More recent analyses have also examined how digital media environments intensify framing effects by accelerating the circulation of visual and symbolic content (Geise & Xu, 2025; Peng et al., 2024). Collectively, these studies demonstrate the significance of media framing in shaping protest narratives. However, they often treat framing as a descriptive process rather than a mechanism of power.

Despite these advances, important gaps remain in the literature. Existing studies have largely analyzed media framing and state power as separate domains, failing to fully capture their structural

interdependence. Moreover, the dual nature of policing—simultaneously repressive and persuasive—has rarely been examined as a unified construct within media discourse. As a result, the role of media in legitimizing coercive authority remains under-theorized. This study addresses this limitation by arguing that media framing functions as an ideological mechanism that actively produces legitimacy for state repression. In doing so, it moves beyond descriptive accounts of framing toward a critical analysis of its role in sustaining power relations. This perspective challenges the conventional view of media as neutral intermediaries. Instead, it positions media as active participants in the reproduction of political order.

This study aims to analyze how media framing constructs representations of repressive and persuasive policing in protest coverage, using demonstrations related to the KPK and RUU KUHP as an empirical case. By applying the Gamson and Modigliani framing model and interpreting the findings through the lens of RSA and ISA, this research seeks to uncover the ideological processes embedded within media narratives. The study contributes theoretically by integrating framing theory with critical state theory, offering a novel framework for understanding how legitimacy is constructed through discourse. It also provides practical insights into the role of media in shaping public perceptions of protest and state authority. Furthermore, this research highlights the importance of critically engaging with media representations in democratic societies. Ultimately, it demonstrates that power operates not only through coercion but also through the symbolic construction of meaning.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design with a critical interpretive approach to examine how media framing constructs representations of repressive and persuasive policing in protest coverage. A qualitative design was selected because the study seeks to analyze meaning-making processes, symbolic representation, and ideological structures embedded within media discourse rather than to quantify relationships between variables (KhosraviNik, 2022). Specifically, the research utilized framing analysis based on the model developed by (Kermani, 2025; Roslyng & Dindler, 2023b), which enables the identification of interpretive packages, framing devices, and reasoning structures within media texts. This approach was further strengthened by incorporating (Dodge & Metze, 2024; Guenther et al., 2024) perspectives on framing as a process of selection and salience construction. In addition, Althusser's theoretical framework of Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) and Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) was employed to interpret the ideological implications of media narratives (Rahim et al., 2023). The integration of these frameworks allows for a comprehensive analysis that captures both textual patterns and their broader socio-political significance. This methodological approach is particularly suitable for examining how discourse operates as a mechanism of power and legitimacy within mediated environments.

The study was conducted within the context of Indonesian media coverage of protests related to the revision of the Corruption Eradication Commission Law and the Draft Criminal Code. The temporal scope focused on the period from 23 to 25 September 2019, which represents the peak of protest intensity and media attention. This period was selected to ensure a concentrated analysis of framing practices during moments of heightened socio-political tension. The research context was limited to two major online news platforms, *Republika.co.id* and *Detik.com*, which are among the most influential digital media outlets in Indonesia. These platforms were selected due to their high audience reach, differing editorial orientations, and active role in shaping public discourse. The focus on online media reflects the contemporary transformation of news consumption, where digital platforms dominate the dissemination and circulation of information. Therefore, the chosen context provides a relevant setting for examining contemporary media framing practices.

The population of this study consisted of all news articles related to the protests published by the selected media outlets during the specified period. A purposive sampling technique was employed to identify information-rich cases that are most relevant to the research objectives (Merkebu et al., 2025; Mtisi, 2022). A total of 24 news articles were selected, comprising 12 articles from each media outlet. The inclusion criteria required that the articles explicitly contain representations of police actions and demonstrator behavior, particularly those depicting repressive actions, such as the use of force, or persuasive actions, such as negotiation and communication

strategies. Articles that only reported general information without discussing interactions between police and demonstrators were excluded. This sampling strategy was designed to ensure analytical depth rather than statistical generalization. The selected dataset provides a focused yet sufficiently varied corpus for identifying framing patterns across different media narratives.

The primary research instrument was a structured coding framework developed based on the Gamson and Modigliani framing model. This framework included framing devices such as metaphors, catchphrases, exemplars, depictions, and visual images, as well as reasoning devices including roots, consequences, appeals to principle, and treatment recommendations (Hart, 2023). Each category was operationalized into specific indicators to guide the systematic identification of textual and visual elements within the data. In addition, the instrument incorporated analytical dimensions derived from RSA and ISA theory to interpret the ideological implications of the identified frames. A coding sheet was designed to document the presence and patterns of repressive and persuasive representations across the dataset. The unit of analysis included headlines, leads, body text, and accompanying visual images, allowing for a comprehensive examination of both verbal and visual framing elements. This structured instrument ensured consistency, transparency, and analytical rigor in the coding process.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument, several methodological procedures were implemented. Content validity was established through expert judgment involving two scholars in media studies and political communication, who evaluated the relevance and clarity of the coding categories. Construct validity was ensured by aligning the coding framework with established theoretical constructs in framing theory and critical state theory (McGrath, 2025; Siahaan et al., 2025; van Dijk, 2023). A pilot test was conducted on a subset of six articles to refine the coding scheme and eliminate ambiguities. Intercoder reliability was assessed by involving an independent coder who analyzed a portion of the data using the same coding framework. The level of agreement between coders was measured using Cohen's Kappa coefficient, which yielded a value of 0.82, indicating a high level of reliability (Coleman et al., 2024; Ibrahim & Matore, 2025). These procedures ensured that the instrument produced consistent and credible analytical results across different coders and contexts.

Data collection was conducted through a systematic and transparent process. First, relevant articles were identified through keyword-based searches within the archives of the selected media platforms. The keywords included terms related to demonstrations, police actions, and the specific policy issues under investigation. Second, the identified articles were screened based on the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure relevance. Third, the selected articles were downloaded, organized, and stored in a structured database. Each article was assigned a unique identification code to facilitate systematic analysis and referencing. Both textual content and visual elements were documented to ensure comprehensive data coverage. This procedure ensured that the dataset was well-organized, traceable, and suitable for in-depth qualitative analysis.

The data analysis process followed a multi-stage qualitative procedure. First, data reduction was conducted by identifying and extracting relevant segments of text and images related to the research focus (Coleman et al., 2024; Das & Singh, 2022). Second, open coding was applied to classify these segments according to the predefined framing and reasoning devices. Third, the coded data were categorized into broader thematic groups representing repressive and persuasive frames. Fourth, thematic analysis was conducted to identify dominant interpretive patterns and recurring framing structures (Ozuem et al., 2025; Wilson, 2025). Finally, the findings were interpreted using the RSA and ISA framework to uncover the ideological dimensions of media framing and its role in legitimizing state power. This analytical process emphasizes analytical generalization rather than statistical inference, allowing the study to produce theoretically meaningful insights. While the study focuses on selected media outlets, it does not aim for broad generalization but rather for an in-depth understanding of framing mechanisms within a specific socio-political context.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process. Although the study utilized publicly accessible media content, attention was given to maintaining academic integrity, transparency, and responsible data use. All sources were properly cited, and no data were altered or misrepresented. The analysis was conducted objectively, without bias toward any particular media outlet or political actor. Interpretations were grounded in empirical data and supported by theoretical reasoning to ensure credibility. By adhering to these ethical principles, the study maintains methodological rigor and scholarly accountability.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The analysis demonstrates that media coverage of the demonstrations consistently constructs a dominant narrative centered on conflict, disorder, and confrontation between demonstrators and the police. Demonstrations, which fundamentally function as a democratic channel for articulating public demands, are reframed as chaotic events characterized by instability and disruption. This transformation is evident in repeated expressions such as “aksi ricuh” and “bentrokan berlanjut,” which shift the focus from political substance to situational tension. The media selectively foregrounds scenes of violence and escalation while marginalizing the core issues underlying the protests. As a result, demonstrations are interpreted less as forms of civic engagement and more as disturbances requiring control. This pattern reflects a systematic discursive process in which the meaning of protest is reconstructed through selective emphasis. The framing does not merely describe events but actively reconfigures them into a problem of public order. This indicates that media narratives function as structured mechanisms shaping perception, evaluation, and interpretation of political reality.

To capture the overall pattern across all analyzed samples, the dominant framing structures are synthesized in Table 1, which presents the recurring alignment between framing devices, narrative logic, and ideological implications. The table reveals that media coverage consistently organizes meaning through a limited set of interpretive frames that are repeatedly reproduced across different reports. Each frame is supported by specific linguistic markers, visual cues, and causal reasoning that guide audience interpretation. The repetition of these patterns suggests that framing is not incidental but systematic and structured. The convergence of textual and visual elements strengthens the coherence of each frame, making it more persuasive and stable. The presence of consistent narrative logic across different media sources further reinforces the dominance of these frames. This consistency indicates that the framing process operates at a structural level rather than as isolated editorial choices. Consequently, the patterns identified in Table 1 provide a comprehensive overview of how meaning is constructed within media coverage of protests.

**Table 1.** Dominant Media Frames in Protest Coverage

Dominant Frame	Framing Devices	Example Evidence	Reasoning Structure	Core Meaning	Ideological Implication
Police as legitimate authority	“mengamankan”, “mengendalikan”, protective visuals	“9 anggota polisi terluka”	Disorder threatens stability	Police as protector	Legitimizes state authority
Demonstrators as sources of disorder	“aksi ricuh”, “demo anarkis”, violent imagery	“mahasiswa melempari polisi”	Protest triggers unrest	Protest as threat	Delegitimizes dissent
External actors as cause of violence	“Anarko Sindikalisme”	“kelompok menyusupi demo”	Violence caused by infiltrators	Protest hijacked	Justifies intervention
Persuasion as ineffective	“imbauan diabaikan”	“kami bukan musuh Anda”	Escalation requires control	Soft approach fails	Normalizes repression
Repression as necessary outcome	“memukul mundur massa”	police chasing crowd	Force restores order	Control achieved	Accepts coercion

The table demonstrates a clear pattern in which linguistic choices, visual representations, and narrative structures converge to produce a consistent interpretation of protest events. The repeated use of labels such as “chaotic” and “anarchic” systematically positions demonstrators as sources of instability. At the same time, the portrayal of police actions as responses to disorder reinforces their role as legitimate authorities. The presence of causal reasoning, particularly through references to external infiltration, strengthens the justification for intervention. Persuasive efforts are acknowledged but consistently framed as insufficient when confronted with escalating conflict. This

creates a narrative progression in which repression appears as the logical outcome. The integration of textual and visual elements amplifies the persuasive force of these frames. The overall structure of representation shifts attention from political issues to concerns about stability and control. This indicates that media framing operates as a mechanism that organizes perception in a structured and predictable manner.

The first sample illustrates how the police are constructed as victims through strategic linguistic and visual framing. The headline emphasizes the injuries suffered by police officers, as expressed in “9 anggota polisi terluka,” which immediately directs audience sympathy toward the police. The initial absence of a clearly identified perpetrator delays attribution of responsibility, creating a narrative gap that is later filled by identifying students as the source of violence. The statement “mahasiswa melempari polisi dengan benda keras” establishes a direct causal link that positions demonstrators as initiators of disorder. The label “aksi ricuh” functions as a delegitimizing device that transforms the protest into an event defined by chaos. Visual imagery reinforces this narrative by depicting dense crowds and physical confrontation, intensifying the perception of instability. The composition of the image, with authorities positioned above and demonstrators below, symbolically reflects hierarchical power relations. This visual hierarchy reinforces the perception of the police as protectors of order. The combined effect of these elements constructs a narrative in which coercive action is framed as defensive and justified.

The second sample demonstrates how the media constructs explanatory narratives that shift responsibility for violence away from the police through the introduction of external actors. The reference to “Anarko Sindikalisme” serves as a framing device that redefines the source of unrest. This narrative suggests that violence originates from infiltrating groups rather than from the demonstrators themselves. By constructing this explanation, the media provides a causal foundation that legitimizes police intervention. The reliance on official statements strengthens the authority and credibility of this narrative. References to previous incidents involving similar groups function as exemplars that reinforce the plausibility of the claim. This strategy simplifies the complexity of the protest by reducing it to a security issue. The narrative redirects attention from internal grievances to external disruption. This shift creates a coherent logic in which intervention appears necessary. The framing thus operates to stabilize the legitimacy of control measures.

The third sample reveals how the portrayal of demonstrators combines elements of persistence and violence in a single narrative structure. The phrase “bertahan hingga malam” initially conveys determination and commitment to the protest. However, this is immediately counterbalanced by expressions such as “bentrokan berlanjut,” which emphasize ongoing confrontation. The use of militaristic language, including “barikade” and “merangsek,” intensifies the perception of conflict. These terms create a narrative that resembles a battlefield scenario, where escalation appears inevitable. The depiction of reciprocal actions, such as the use of water cannons and the throwing of objects, constructs an image of symmetrical violence. Visual elements showing disrupted public spaces reinforce the sense of instability. This framing shifts attention away from the purpose of the protest and toward the dynamics of conflict. The narrative constructs escalation as a continuous process rather than a contingent event. As a result, the use of force is normalized within the logic of confrontation.

The fourth sample highlights the representation of persuasive strategies employed by the police within media narratives. The statement “kami bukan musuh Anda” positions the police as actors attempting to de-escalate conflict through communication. These messages combine rational and emotional appeals, emphasizing shared interests and social relationships. The framing suggests that the police are engaging in efforts to restore order without coercion. However, the placement of these messages within a broader context of unrest undermines their effectiveness. The juxtaposition of calming language with images of ongoing conflict creates a tension between intention and outcome. Visual elements, such as the presence of police vehicles, reinforce the continued authority of the state. This combination indicates that persuasion operates within a framework of underlying control. The narrative positions persuasion as a temporary or preliminary measure. Ultimately, it is framed as insufficient in addressing escalating situations.

The fifth sample demonstrates how labeling practices construct demonstrators as sources of disorder and instability. The term “demo anarkis” functions as a symbolic label that defines the nature of the protest. This label carries moral implications that influence how the event is

interpreted. The depiction of students being “digelandang” reinforces a narrative of control and coercion. Visual imagery showing individuals actively throwing objects strengthens the perception of aggression. The consistent association between demonstrators and violence creates a stable narrative pattern. This pattern shifts attention away from the motivations behind the protest. The causal structure presented in the text positions police action as a response to disorder. This framing reduces the complexity of the event into a binary opposition between order and chaos. As a result, the legitimacy of coercive measures is reinforced through repeated association.

The sixth sample reveals a transition from persuasive to repressive framing within the sequence of media coverage. Initial narratives emphasizing communication are followed by descriptions of forceful intervention, such as “memukul mundur massa.” The use of the label “perusuh” further categorizes demonstrators as threats requiring suppression. Descriptions of police actions emphasize organization, coordination, and control. The portrayal of outcomes, including arrests and injuries, provides tangible evidence of confrontation. However, the lack of detailed explanation regarding these outcomes introduces ambiguity. This ambiguity allows for multiple interpretations without undermining the overall narrative. The sequence constructs a progression in which repression appears as the final stage. This progression frames escalation as inevitable. The narrative thus normalizes the transition from persuasion to coercion.

The overall findings indicate that media framing operates as a structured mechanism that shapes how protests and policing are understood. The police are consistently positioned as legitimate actors responsible for maintaining order, while demonstrators are framed as sources of disruption. Persuasive approaches are acknowledged but ultimately presented as ineffective. This combination forms a dominant interpretive package in which coercion appears justified. The framing process shifts attention from political issues to concerns about stability. As a result, protest is transformed into a problem of order management. The consistent use of linguistic and visual elements reinforces this transformation. These patterns reveal a systematic alignment between representation and authority. The findings demonstrate that media framing plays a central role in constructing legitimacy within protest coverage.

## Discussion

The findings demonstrate that media coverage systematically reconstructs protest events as disruptions of social order rather than as legitimate expressions of democratic participation, thereby reconfiguring the ontological status of protest itself. This transformation is not merely a representational shift but a structural rearticulation of meaning in which dissent is discursively displaced into the domain of security. While framing theory traditionally conceptualizes media as organizing interpretive packages (Cobo et al., 2026; Roslyng & Dindler, 2023), the present study advances this perspective by arguing that framing operates as an embedded ideological mechanism that actively aligns with state power. In this sense, media narratives do not simply interpret reality but participate in the production of political order. This finding challenges the dominant assumption that media function as neutral intermediaries in democratic systems, instead revealing their role in stabilizing hegemonic structures. Similar tendencies have been observed in global protest coverage that privileges conflict over substance (Culver & McLeod, 2023; Harlow & Bachmann, 2024), yet this study extends the literature by explicitly theorizing this pattern as an ideological process rather than a descriptive bias. The implication is that protest is not delegitimized incidentally but through systematic discursive alignment. Consequently, this research reconceptualizes framing as a site where meaning and power converge in the reproduction of legitimacy.

The consistent construction of the police as legitimate authority further illustrates how discourse operates to naturalize state power through symbolic representation. The portrayal of police as protectors, reinforced by narratives of injury and sacrifice, generates a moral economy in which coercive actions appear justified and necessary. Within the RSA–ISA framework, this finding reveals a critical intersection where coercion (RSA) is rendered acceptable through ideological mediation (ISA), thus blurring the boundary between force and consent. This extends legitimacy theory by demonstrating that legitimacy is not solely derived from institutional performance but is discursively produced through repeated narrative patterns (Asad & Zia, 2025). Prior studies have shown that media often humanize law enforcement while marginalizing protest actors (Bonner & Dammert, 2022; Fernandes & Silva, 2024), but the present study contributes a deeper structural

explanation by identifying framing as the mechanism through which this asymmetry is reproduced. The normalization of police authority within media discourse suggests that legitimacy is less a reflection of reality than an outcome of narrative construction. This finding also raises critical questions about the extent to which public trust is mediated rather than organically formed. Therefore, the study not only supports existing theories but also extends them by embedding legitimacy within discursive processes. This reconceptualization positions media as an active agent in the symbolic consolidation of authority.

The framing of demonstrators as sources of disorder constitutes a discursive strategy that systematically delegitimizes dissent by reducing complex political grievances into simplified categories of deviance. Through the use of labels such as “anarchic” and “chaotic,” media narratives transform protest into a moral problem rather than a political one. This process aligns with discursive power theory, which emphasizes the role of language in constructing social hierarchies and boundaries (van Dijk, 2023), yet the present findings extend this perspective by demonstrating how such labeling operates within a structured ideological apparatus. By foregrounding behavioral disruption and suppressing substantive demands, the media effectively reorients public attention away from structural issues. Previous research has similarly identified the marginalization of protest goals in favor of sensational narratives (Proust & Saldaña, 2022; Peng et al., 2024), but this study advances the discussion by linking this tendency to the reproduction of power relations. The consistency of these labels across different outlets suggests a systemic pattern rather than isolated editorial decisions. This indicates that the delegitimization of dissent is embedded within broader discursive structures. The implication is that dissent becomes socially intelligible only within predefined limits imposed by dominant narratives. As a result, protest is not merely reported but reconstituted as a threat requiring containment.

The use of external actors as explanatory devices reveals how media narratives construct causal frameworks that justify intervention while obscuring underlying structural tensions. By attributing violence to infiltrating groups, the media shifts responsibility away from both the state and the broader socio-political conditions that give rise to protest. This aligns with attribution theory in communication studies (Geise & Xu, 2025), yet the present study extends this concept by situating attribution within an ideological function that stabilizes authority. The introduction of external threats creates a simplified binary logic that legitimizes coercive responses as defensive measures. Similar patterns have been identified in international contexts where external actors are invoked to explain protest escalation (Baranauskas, 2022; Hasan & Al-Zaman, 2026), but this study contributes by demonstrating how such narratives are systematically embedded within framing structures. This finding challenges the assumption that media explanations are neutral or purely informative. Instead, it shows that causal narratives are selectively constructed to reinforce specific power configurations. The implication is that complexity is reduced not for clarity but for ideological coherence. Consequently, the study highlights how explanation itself becomes a site of power.

The portrayal of persuasive policing as ineffective introduces a critical tension that exposes the limits of democratic discourse within media representation. While negotiation and communication are presented as normative ideals, they are consistently framed as inadequate in the face of escalating conflict. This paradox reflects a deeper contradiction within governance systems, where democratic values coexist with coercive practices. Within the RSA–ISA framework, persuasion operates as an ideological tool that ultimately gives way to repression as material force (Rahim et al., 2023). The findings suggest that media narratives construct a sequential logic in which persuasion is a temporary phase preceding inevitable coercion. Previous studies have noted the coexistence of negotiation and force in protest policing (Stott et al., 2026; Sablina, 2026), yet this study advances the literature by demonstrating how media framing normalizes this transition. This normalization redefines the failure of persuasion not as a contingent outcome but as an expected trajectory. The implication is that dialogue is symbolically maintained but structurally undermined. Therefore, the study reveals how media discourse subtly prioritizes control over democratic engagement.

The normalization of repression as a necessary and rational outcome represents one of the most significant theoretical contributions of this study. By framing coercive actions as logical responses to disorder, media narratives construct a discursive environment in which repression becomes both acceptable and expected. This finding aligns with critical state theory, which posits that power is sustained through the interplay of coercion and ideology (Kadri, 2023; Paraná et al.,

2026), yet it extends this framework by identifying media framing as the mechanism that integrates these dimensions. The repeated association between disorder and force creates a causal logic that naturalizes state violence. Prior research has demonstrated that media exposure can influence public acceptance of coercive practices (Harlow & Bachmann, 2024; Asad & Zia, 2025), but this study contributes by showing how such acceptance is discursively constructed rather than merely psychologically internalized. This shifts the analytical focus from audience effects to structural production of meaning. The implication is that repression is not simply justified after the fact but preconditioned through narrative structures. This finding challenges the neutrality of media discourse and highlights its role in shaping the limits of democratic tolerance.

Ultimately, the study reveals a structural interdependence between media framing and state power that redefines the relationship between discourse, legitimacy, and democracy. By integrating framing theory with the RSA–ISA framework, this research offers a novel conceptual model in which media functions as an ideological extension of governance. This contribution addresses a significant gap in the literature, where framing and state power have often been analyzed separately. The findings suggest that legitimacy is not an inherent property of institutions but a dynamic construct produced through discursive alignment. While similar patterns have been observed globally (Geise & Xu, 2025; Peng et al., 2024), the present study provides a context-specific analysis that enriches the global debate by highlighting how these mechanisms operate within Indonesian media systems. This positioning underscores the relevance of the study beyond its local context, contributing to broader discussions on media and power. The research also opens new avenues for examining how digital media environments may further intensify these dynamics. Therefore, the study not only supports existing theories but significantly extends them by demonstrating how discourse operates as a central mechanism in the reproduction of political order.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that media framing operates not merely as a mechanism of representation but as a structural process that actively constructs and legitimizes state authority within protest contexts. The findings reveal that protest events are systematically redefined from expressions of democratic participation into problems of public order, thereby shifting their political meaning through discursive reconstruction. In this process, the police are consistently framed as legitimate protectors, while demonstrators are positioned as sources of instability, creating an asymmetrical narrative that privileges authority over dissent. The integration of framing theory with the Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatus framework provides a deeper understanding of how coercion and ideology are interconnected through media discourse. This study advances existing scholarship by demonstrating that legitimacy is not passively reflected in media narratives but actively produced through structured framing practices. Furthermore, the research highlights how persuasive strategies are symbolically maintained yet discursively undermined, ultimately normalizing the transition toward coercive control.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the refinement of framing theory by repositioning it within a critical perspective that emphasizes its role in the reproduction of power relations. It also extends critical state theory by identifying media as a central site where ideological and coercive mechanisms converge to sustain political order. Practically, the findings underscore the need for greater critical awareness of media representations in democratic societies, particularly in how narratives shape public perceptions of legitimacy and dissent. By situating the Indonesian case within broader global patterns, this research provides a contextually grounded yet conceptually transferable insight into the relationship between media, power, and democracy. Ultimately, the study establishes that legitimacy is a dynamic and contested construct, produced through the interplay of discourse, ideology, and institutional authority, rather than an inherent attribute of the state.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Asrul M Mustaqim conceptualized the study, developed the theoretical framework, conducted data analysis, and drafted the original manuscript. Udi Rusadi contributed to research design, supervised the methodological approach, and provided critical revisions to strengthen the analytical

arguments. Sadakita Br Karo was responsible for data collection, coding procedures, and validation of the analytical framework. Yuyun Rahmawati contributed to literature review development, interpretation of findings, and final manuscript editing. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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