

Enhancing Student Participation in University Policy Making to Prevent Campus Violence

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ABSTRACT. This qualitative study explores how student participation in university governance relates to campus violence in an Indonesian public university. The main goal is to understand how the lack of student involvement in decision-making can lead to protest and conflict. Data were collected exclusively through in-depth interviews with students. To strengthen the credibility and validity of the findings, the research employed data triangulation through two rounds of interviews. The second round was conducted to clarify, confirm, and further explore statements that were unclear or incomplete in the first round. In addition, selected interview excerpts and preliminary interpretations were shared with all participants to ensure that the analysis accurately reflected their perspectives. The findings show that when students are excluded from important decisions, such as when their petitions are ignored, policies are made without consultation, or security officers respond harshly, their trust in university leaders declines. As a result, peaceful demonstrations often turn into confrontations. These events are not sudden or irrational but develop from repeated neglect and frustration. On the other hand, examples of genuine collaboration, such as student-staff committees and joint policy discussions, help reduce tension and create a more positive campus atmosphere. The study also highlights a major challenge in Indonesian higher education: although democratic systems exist, many universities still employ top-down practices that limit students' real influence. The research concludes that student violence is a response to governance problems rather than a natural tendency toward aggression. By combining ideas from participatory governance, conflict resolution, and student activism, this study shows that involving students in real decision-making can build trust and prevent conflict. Overall, the findings suggest that a true partnership between students and administrators is essential for improving university governance and strengthening democracy in post-authoritarian societies.

Keywords: *Student Participation, Campus Violence, University Governance, Protest Escalation, Inclusive Decision-Making*

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions occupy a uniquely influential position in society as incubators of future leaders and drivers of national development (Akhyar et al., 2024; Balqis et al., 2025; Daulay et al., 2024; Verma, 2025; Yuliana et al., 2025). Beyond their core function of knowledge transmission, universities serve as critical socialization agents where students develop the cognitive abilities, ethical frameworks, and civic competencies required for engaged citizenship (Harahap, 2024; Hirt, 2023; Widiawati & Firman, 2025). The UNESCO 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explicitly recognizes higher education's transformative potential, emphasizing its role in promoting peaceful and inclusive societies through education for global citizenship (UNESCO,

2023). This expansive vision of higher education's purpose demands institutional cultures that foster not just academic excellence but also democratic participation and social responsibility. Research consistently demonstrates that universities with strong, inclusive cultures characterized by shared governance, transparent decision-making, and meaningful student involvement achieve better educational outcomes across multiple dimensions (Snijders et al., 2020). (Mtshweni, 2024) study reveals that institutional commitment to participatory governance significantly enhances students' sense of belonging and academic persistence. Similarly, (Morgan & Davis, 2019) found that institutions with robust student engagement mechanisms reported lower rates of disruptive protests and interpersonal conflicts.

The Indonesian higher education context presents a particularly compelling case for examining the relationship between student participation and campus violence due to its unique historical and sociopolitical dynamics. Since the Reformasi era that followed Suharto's fall in 1998 (Adiprasetyo, 2025), Indonesian universities have undergone significant democratization, yet vestiges of authoritarian governance structures persist in many institutions (Logli, 2016). The National Education System Law (No. 20/2003) and subsequent Higher Education Law (No. 12/2012) established formal provisions for student participation in university governance, including representation in academic senates and quality assurance bodies. However, implementation remains uneven across Indonesia's nearly 4,500 higher education institutions, with many maintaining hierarchical, bureaucratic cultures that limit meaningful student influence (Logli, 2016). This governance gap helps explain the paradoxical coexistence of vibrant student activism alongside frequent eruptions of destructive behavior. Contemporary manifestations of this dynamic include violent clashes between student groups, vandalism of campus property during demonstrations, and physical altercations with security personnel, all behaviors that undermine the very democratic values universities should embody.

The theoretical framework for this study integrates three complementary perspectives that collectively illuminate the potential of participatory governance to prevent campus violence (Lo, 2025). First, (Fung & Wright, 2003) model of empowered participatory governance provide a structural lens for analyzing how institutional design can either facilitate or constrain student influence. Their concept of countervailing power is particularly relevant for understanding how formal student representation can check administrative authority in ways that prevent policy imposition and subsequent backlash (Fung & Wright, 2003). Second, drawing on Freirean critical pedagogy (Shor, 2002), we examine how dialogic processes in policy formation can transform student identities from passive recipients to active co-creators of institutional norms, thereby reducing alienating effects that often fuel destructive behavior. Third, (Lederach, 2015) conflict transformation framework helps explain how sustained participation builds relational capacities and institutional channels that redirect conflict energy toward constructive change rather than violent expression. Together, these theoretical perspectives suggest that the quality and depth of student participation - not just its existence - determines its effectiveness in preventing violence (Hasibuan, 2026; Nursyifa et al., 2026, 2026; Wahid et al., 2023). Surface-level consultations or token representation may actually exacerbate tensions by creating expectations of influence that go unfulfilled, whereas meaningful shared decision-making authority appears to correlate with more stable campus environments (Johnson, 2025).

Existing research on student participation in university governance reveals several persistent gaps that this study addresses. While extensive literature documents the benefits of student engagement for learning outcomes and institutional performance (Kuh, 2001);(Adeniyi et al., 2024)(Lee, 2025)(Bowden et al., 2021), few studies examine its role in preventing campus violence (Kester & Misiaszek, 2025), particularly in Global South contexts. Most research focuses on Western democracies where student representation systems are well-established (Klemenčič, 2024) (Klemenčič, 2012) (Matthews & Dollinger, 2023), overlooking how different political histories and institutional cultures shape participation dynamics. For instance, the European Student Union model illustrates how comprehensive student involvement in governance can serve

as a mechanism for conflict resolution and violence prevention. By giving students formal channels to voice concerns and influence decision-making, this model reduces the likelihood that grievances escalate into confrontational or destructive behavior. In contrast, Indonesian universities often rely on more limited and ad hoc forms of participation (Rensimer & Brooks, 2025), which leave students without consistent avenues to address dissatisfaction. This governance gap helps explain why protests in Indonesia are frequently framed either as political phenomena (Ancelovici & Guzmán-Concha, 2019) or as disciplinary problems (Feinberg & Salehyan, 2025), with less attention to their underlying roots in institutional governance failures. This study bridges these gaps by investigating how structural variations in participation mechanisms affect campus conflict patterns, with particular attention to cultural and historical specificities of the Indonesian context. The research also extends current understanding by distinguishing between different forms of participation - from information-sharing to co-decision making - and analyzing how each relates to violence prevention.

The practical significance of this research extends across both university-level and societal-level impacts. At the university level, the study provides leaders and policymakers with evidence-based models for designing participation systems that balance student agency with administrative effectiveness. The comparative analysis of governance structures across Indonesian universities yields concrete recommendations for reforming student representation in ways that align with both local cultural norms and international best practices. For example, consensus-based approaches rooted in Indonesian traditions of *musyawarah* can be adapted into formalized student representation mechanisms, ensuring that participation is both culturally legitimate and institutionally transparent. In addition, the findings offer student affairs professionals practical insights into programming that can build participation competencies and establish mediation channels to resolve conflicts before they escalate.

At the societal level, the research contributes to Indonesia's democratic consolidation by demonstrating how universities can model deliberative democracy through inclusive governance. Universities serve as microcosms of society, and the way they resolve internal conflicts has implications for how graduates later engage with political and civic life. By embedding inclusive and participatory structures, universities can help cultivate citizens who are accustomed to dialogue, compromise, and collective decision making rather than confrontation. This contribution is consistent with the national education philosophy of Pancasila, particularly its principles of social justice and consensus-based decision making (Kardiman et al., 2025). Moreover, strengthening participatory governance on campus also reduces the likelihood that student grievances escalate into violent demonstrations, thereby reinforcing universities' role as stabilizing democratic institutions. More broadly, the study's approach generates transferable knowledge about participation-based violence prevention that could inform higher education reform in other post-authoritarian contexts facing similar challenges of democratic institutionalization.

Campus violence represents a persistent and pressing challenge in Indonesian higher education, where democratic traditions of student activism coexist with fragile governance structures that often lack effective mechanisms for participation. Understanding how student involvement can be structured to prevent violence is therefore both socially urgent and institutionally necessary. Against this backdrop, the central aim of this study is to investigate how inclusive governance practices in Indonesian universities can function as a mechanism for campus violence prevention. In this case, this study aimed to answer the following research question; "*How do structural and cultural factors shape the nature and dynamics of student participation and conflict within Indonesian higher education institutions?*" Then, this study's expected contributions advance both scholarly understanding and practical interventions. Theoretically, it develops a novel framework for analyzing student participation as a violence prevention mechanism, integrating insights from education governance, conflict studies, and political sociology. Empirically, it generates rare systematic data on student participation dynamics in Indonesian higher education, filling a significant gap in the comparative literature on university governance. Practically, the research

produces actionable tools including a participatory governance assessment rubric and conflict mediation protocols tailored to Indonesian institutional contexts. Policy recommendations address multiple levels, from specific reforms to student representation systems to broader quality assurance measures that incentivize meaningful participation. By demonstrating how inclusive governance can simultaneously enhance educational quality and campus safety, this study adds value to existing literature by reframing student participation not merely as a democratic ideal but as a concrete strategy for violence prevention. The ultimate goal is to transform universities from battlegrounds of competing interests into collaborative communities where all members share responsibility for creating and sustaining environments conducive to learning, growth, and peaceful coexistence.

METHOD

The research employed a qualitative case study design (Gammelgaard, 2017) to explore the relationship between student participation in university governance and incidents of campus violence at an Islamic state university in Indonesia between 2018 and 2023. The study utilized an exploratory and descriptive approach (Lim, 2025), relying primarily on in-depth interviews supplemented by document analysis and participant observation where possible. This multi-method strategy allowed for a comprehensive examination of protest dynamics, decision-making processes, and institutional responses from multiple stakeholder perspectives (Porchak et al., 2025). Then, participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques (Lim, 2025) to ensure representation from key groups involved in campus governance and protest actions. The final sample consisted of eleven individuals, including five students from various faculties such as Tarbiyah (Education), Engineering, and Medicine. These student participants represented different academic levels, with two third-year students, two fourth-year students, and one recent graduate. The study also interviewed three student leaders holding positions in student government and senate, along with three faculty members and administrators, including the Vice Dean for Student Affairs, an Education Professor, and a senior administrator involved in policy-making. The gender distribution was nearly balanced, with six male and five female participants.

Data collection centered on semi-structured interviews (Lim, 2025) lasting between 45 to 90 minutes, with questions designed to elicit detailed accounts of protest experiences, perceptions of student participation mechanisms, and institutional barriers to dialogue. Sample questions explored specific incidents where protests escalated into violence, the effectiveness of student representation in university decision-making, and structural obstacles to meaningful engagement. All interviews were recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized using participant codes (P1, P2, etc.). Document analysis complemented these interviews by examining university policies, official statements regarding protests, and records of student-administration meetings. In some cases, researchers observed student council meetings and protest gatherings to gain first-hand insight into interaction dynamics. Following (Achruh & Sukirman, 2024), thematic analysis served as the primary analytical framework, progressing through open, axial, and selective coding phases to identify recurring patterns and relationships. Initial open coding categorized raw data into broad themes such as “security responses,” “exclusion from decision-making,” and “protest escalation triggers.” Axial coding then connected these categories, revealing how administrative exclusion correlated with protest violence, while selective coding developed the core narrative of structural barriers leading to institutional distrust and confrontational outcomes. To enhance validity, the study employed triangulation by cross-verifying interview data with documentary evidence and observational notes.

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research process. As done by (Sukirman & Kabilan, 2023), all participants also provided informed consent, with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity upheld through the use of pseudonyms and omission of identifying details. The study acknowledged limitations, including potential bias from student activists emphasizing grievances or administrators minimizing institutional shortcomings, as well as

constraints on generalizability given the single-institution focus. Despite these limitations, the methodology yielded rich, context-specific insights into how breakdowns in participatory governance fuel campus conflicts. The findings underscore the value of qualitative approaches in uncovering the emotional and institutional dimensions of student-administration tensions, while suggesting opportunities for future mixed-methods research across broader institutional contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings indicate that campus protests were closely related to the quality of student participation in university governance. Students reported limited involvement in important institutional decisions, particularly those affecting tuition and academic regulations. This exclusion often created frustration and distrust toward university authorities. Protests tended to escalate when administrators failed to respond to student concerns or when heavy security measures were introduced, which increased tensions between students and authorities. The data also suggest that student representation structures often functioned symbolically, with limited influence on actual decision making. However, in faculties where students and administrators collaborated in policy development, conflicts were reduced and constructive solutions emerged. The main themes derived from these findings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. *Key Themes Emerging from Student Participation and Campus Protest Dynamics*

Theme	Description	Illustrative Evidence
Lack of Student Participation in Decision Making	Students reported being excluded from important university policy decisions such as tuition increases and academic regulations.	"The university announced a 30% fee increase during the pandemic without discussion with student representatives" (P2).
Administrative Unresponsiveness	Peaceful protests escalated when university officials failed to respond or engage with protesting students.	"Officials refused to come out and address us for hours, so some students started throwing bottles" (P4).
Security Escalation	Heavy security measures intensified tensions and triggered violent confrontations.	"Police arrived with riot shields before anything violent happened, which made the crowd angrier" (P5).
Symbolic Student Representation	Formal participation structures existed but lacked real influence on decision making.	"We attended meetings, but our votes didn't count" (P1).
Successful Participatory Governance	Some faculties implemented collaborative governance models where students and administrators jointly developed policies.	"Students and administrators co-designed solutions to parking issues in the engineering faculty" (P2).

Lack of Student Participation in University Decisions

This study provides an in-depth examination of the complex relationship between student participation in university governance and incidents of campus violence, particularly during protest actions. The findings reveal a troubling pattern at a prominent Islamic university in Indonesia where student demonstrations between 2018 and 2023 frequently escalated into violent confrontations. As one student leader from the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training explained:

Our demonstrations were fundamentally about opposing policies that harmed both students and the broader community, like the sudden fuel price increases that made transportation unaffordable for many students (P4).

This statement highlights how campus protests often connect to larger socioeconomic issues affecting students' daily lives. However, what began as peaceful expressions of dissent frequently deteriorated into destructive behavior. A former student government chairman provided crucial context:

In at least three major protests I witnessed, the violence only started after security personnel used tear gas or physical force against students who were simply sitting and chanting (P1).

Together, these narratives illuminate a recurring pattern in which institutional shortcomings, particularly the absence of effective communication and participatory dialogue mechanisms, transform legitimate expressions of dissent into violent confrontations. The findings thus point to a systemic need for more inclusive governance structures that can mediate student grievances before they escalate into conflict.

The research identified several structural factors contributing to this volatile environment. Most significantly, students reported being systematically excluded from decision-making processes on matters directly impacting their academic experience. Regarding tuition fee policies, one student activist recounted,

The university announced a 30% fee increase during the pandemic when many families were struggling financially, without any prior discussion with student representatives (P2).

Another student echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the lack of consultation in academic policy changes:

When they changed the thesis supervision rules, making it harder to graduate on time, no one asked students how this would affect us (P3).

Such accounts reveal how unilateral administrative decisions fuel frustration and deepen students' sense of marginalization. This perception was partially validated by an institutional perspective. The Vice Dean for Student Affairs candidly reflected:

In hindsight, many conflicts could have been avoided if we had consulted student leaders before implementing sensitive policies (P1).

This acknowledgment underscores that many campus tensions were not inevitable but rather the result of preventable communication failures. Strengthening participatory mechanisms and ensuring transparency in university governance could therefore play a crucial role in mitigating future conflicts.

The Escalation from Peaceful Protest to Violent Confrontation

The study reveals a clear pattern showing how peaceful student demonstrations gradually escalate into violent confrontations (see Figure 1). A student described a typical scenario of protest dynamics:

We would gather at the rectorate building with banners and speeches, but when officials refused to come out and address us for hours, some students would start throwing water bottles (P4).

This account illustrates how administrative silence and prolonged inaction can transform peaceful protests into expressions of frustration. When students feel ignored, minor acts of resistance often emerge as a way to demand attention.

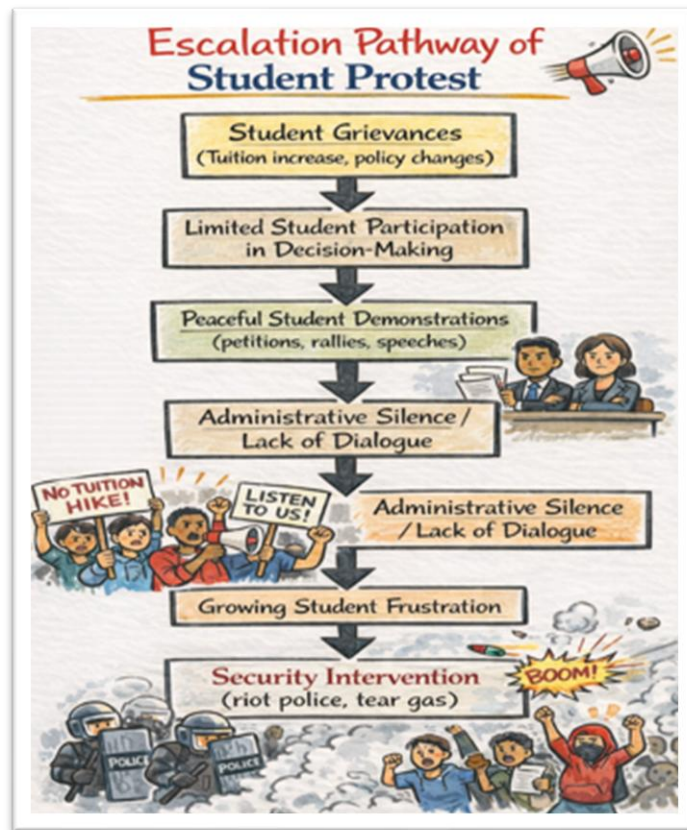


Figure 1. Escalation Pathway of Student Protest

Another perspective from a journalism student highlights the role of excessive security measures in intensifying the situation:

During the 2021 protest against campus corruption, police arrived with riot shields before anyone had done anything violent, which immediately made the crowd angrier (P5).

These narratives reveal how both institutional unresponsiveness and heavy-handed security measures contribute to escalation. A particularly telling account came from a student journalist who had covered multiple protests:

In every case where violence occurred, you could trace it back to three things: ignored petitions, barred access to administrators, and aggressive policing (P2).

Taken together, these testimonies suggest that violence does not emerge as a primary strategy of protest, but rather as a reactionary outcome when all legitimate channels for dialogue and expression are systematically obstructed. *Structural Barriers to Meaningful Student Participation*

The research uncovered systemic obstacles preventing genuine student involvement in governance. Despite legal mandates for student representation, participants described these mechanisms as largely symbolic. A former student senator explained:

We could attend faculty meetings, but when it came time to vote on important matters like curriculum changes, our votes didn't count (P1).

This statement illustrates the superficial nature of participatory structures, where students are invited into decision-making spaces but are effectively excluded from influencing outcomes. The

inability to contribute meaningfully to core academic and administrative decisions undermines the legitimacy of such representation.

Another participant shared a similarly disheartening experience, revealing how consultative bodies often function as procedural formalities rather than channels for genuine dialogue:

The university formed a 'student input committee' for campus development plans, but when we submitted our report about needing more study spaces, they built another administrative office instead (P5).

These examples illustrate how existing participation frameworks often serve as facades rather than functional channels for influence. An education professor interviewed for the study offered a sobering assessment:

The truth is, many administrators still view student participation as a bureaucratic requirement to check off, not as a valuable source of insight(P3).

This observation highlights a persistent cultural barrier within higher education governance, an administrative mindset that perceives student involvement as a procedural obligation rather than a meaningful contribution.

Taken together, these accounts underscore a disjunction between policy rhetoric and institutional practice (see Figure 2). While universities outwardly promote participatory governance, the prevailing administrative attitudes and structural limitations render student participation largely symbolic. This disconnect perpetuates cycles of exclusion, frustration, and potential conflict within the academic community.

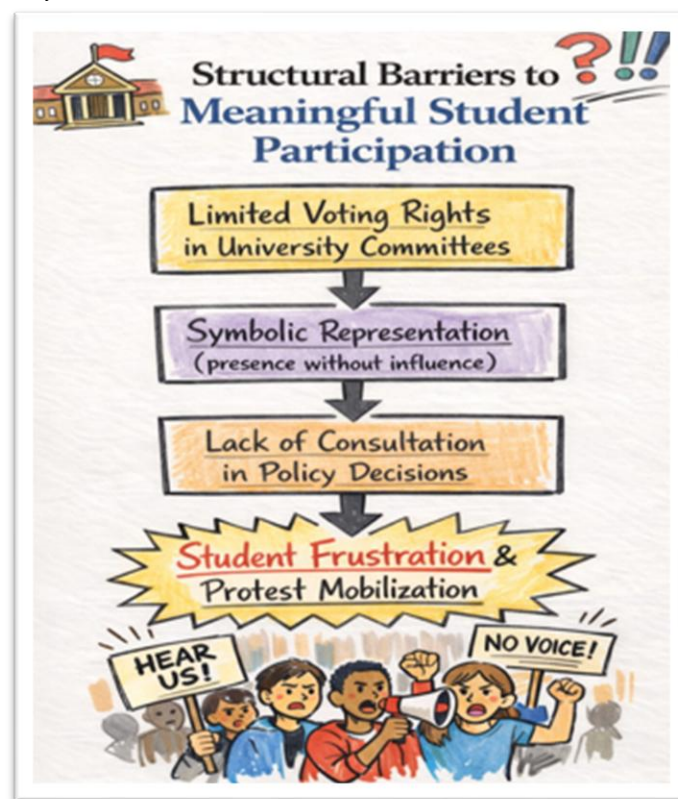


Figure 2. Structural Barriers to Meaningful Student Participation

Alternative Models for Constructive Engagement

The study also identified several successful cases of participatory governance that demonstrate how student involvement can be meaningfully integrated into institutional decision-making. These examples highlight the potential of collaborative structures to replace adversarial dynamics with constructive engagement (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Examples of Effective Participatory Governance*

Faculty	Participatory Strategy	Outcome
Engineering Faculty	Policy Lab involving students and administrators	Collaborative solutions to parking issues
Medical Faculty	Student focus groups before schedule changes	Improved workload distribution
University Leadership	Consultation with student leaders	Increased trust and cooperation

A student leader described an exemplary initiative within the engineering faculty:

In the engineering faculty, they created a policy lab where students and administrators co-designed solutions to parking issues. It worked because we had equal voices at the table (P2).

This account illustrates how co-creation frameworks can transform student participation from symbolic representation into shared governance. By granting students an equal role in problem-solving, the faculty fostered a sense of ownership and accountability that led to tangible results. A similar model was found in the medical faculty, where inclusive consultation processes guided policy adjustments:

Before changing clinical rotation schedules, they held focus groups with affected students and actually implemented our suggestions about workload distribution (P4).

This case underscores the value of participatory feedback mechanisms in policy formation. The faculty's willingness to incorporate student perspectives not only improved the fairness of workload distribution but also enhanced students' perception of institutional responsiveness. A senior administrator who had supported such participatory initiatives offered an important reflection on their broader implications:

When students see their ideas reflected in policies, even partially, it builds trust and makes them more willing to work within the system (P1).

This perspective reinforces the notion that trust is a product of procedural transparency and visible institutional responsiveness. When students witness the concrete impact of their contributions, they become active collaborators rather than oppositional actors.

Collectively, these examples point to a viable and sustainable model of campus governance rooted in early student involvement, transparent communication, and demonstrable policy influence. Such practices not only strengthen institutional legitimacy but also cultivate a culture of mutual respect and shared responsibility within the academic community.

Implications

The accumulated evidence presents a compelling case for rethinking student participation frameworks in Indonesian higher education. As the student affairs vice dean reflected:

We've learned the hard way that excluding students from decisions ultimately creates more problems than it solves" (P3).

This observation encapsulates a recurring pattern identified in the study, when students are marginalized from governance processes, institutional tensions tend to escalate rather than dissipate. The findings reveal that violent protests often represent the cumulative outcome of multiple missed opportunities for dialogue rather than spontaneous acts of aggression. A graduating senior articulated this sentiment with particular clarity:

After four years of ignored petitions and empty meetings, some students feel violence is the only language the administration understands (P1).

This statement underscores the depth of disillusionment that arises when participatory mechanisms exist in form but not in substance. When students perceive institutional consultation as performative rather than genuine, frustration and alienation may translate into confrontational modes of expression.

The study's broader analysis suggests that meaningful reform requires moving beyond superficial consultation toward genuine power-sharing arrangements. Evidence from successful cases demonstrates that when students are treated as legitimate partners in governance, with voting rights on key committees, timely access to information, and transparent accountability mechanisms, the campus climate improves significantly. One reform-minded administrator articulated this strategic reorientation succinctly:

The choice isn't between keeping control and losing control, but between predictable conflicts and productive collaboration (P1).

This insight reframes the challenge not as a threat to administrative authority but as an opportunity to foster collaborative governance that benefits both students and institutions.

Collectively, these findings point to a necessary paradigm shift (see Figure 3): student participation should no longer be viewed as a concession or symbolic gesture, but as an essential dimension of effective and legitimate university governance. Embracing this approach holds the greatest promise for reducing conflict, enhancing institutional trust, and cultivating a more inclusive academic community.



Figure 3. *Conceptual Model of Student Participation and Campus Conflict*

Discussion

This study set out to examine how structural and cultural factors shape the nature and dynamics of student participation and conflict within Indonesian higher education institutions. The findings reveal a persistent disjuncture between formal democratic arrangements and the lived realities of student engagement in governance. Although participatory mechanisms such as student senates, consultation forums, and representation structures are formally institutionalized, their practical influence remains limited. This pattern reflects what (Klemenčič, 2012)(Klemenčič, 2024) conceptualizes as *representation without power*, in which students are present in governance arenas but lack the authority to shape outcomes. In the Indonesian context, this condition is further intensified by post-authoritarian institutional legacies that constrain the transformative potential of participation.

Structurally, the study confirms that student participation is largely framed as consultative rather than deliberative or decisional. This finding resonates with (Logli, 2016) analysis of Indonesian higher education governance, which highlights the dominance of centralized authority and managerial control despite decentralization reforms. Similar dynamics have been observed in other Global South contexts, where educational reforms introduce democratic language without substantially redistributing power (Adeniyi et al., 2024)(Verma, 2025). These reforms often emphasize efficiency, accountability, and performance indicators while marginalizing participatory practices that challenge administrative authority. As a result, student engagement becomes procedural rather than political, reinforcing what (Pfeffer & Cialdini, 2016) describe as the *illusion of influence*. Culturally, the findings demonstrate that participation is shaped by deeply embedded norms regarding hierarchy, obedience, and institutional order. Administrators frequently interpret student activism as a threat to stability rather than as a legitimate expression of civic engagement. This perspective reflects what (Hirt, 2023) terms *institutional socialization*, whereby administrative actors internalize and reproduce dominant governance norms over time. In Indonesia, such norms are historically rooted in the New Order period, during which universities functioned as sites of ideological control rather than democratic deliberation. (Adiprasetyo, 2025) genealogy of Pancasila journalism illustrates how authoritarian discourses were normalized through state institutions, a process mirrored within higher education governance. The persistence of these discursive and cultural legacies helps explain why democratic reforms in universities often remain superficial (Hefner, 2023; Madkan et al., 2025; Margiansyah et al., 2025).

Moments of protest escalation provide a critical empirical lens through which these contradictions become visible. Consistent with (Feinberg & Salehyan, 2025) analysis of protest and repression, this study finds that escalation is rarely spontaneous. Instead, it emerges through cumulative processes of institutional neglect, ignored petitions, and the avoidance of dialogue. When peaceful demonstrations are met with securitized responses, students interpret these actions as confirmation that formal participation channels are ineffective. This pattern aligns with comparative research on student protests in Chile and Quebec, where (Ancelovici & Guzmán-Concha, 2019) show that sustained exclusion and institutional rigidity are key drivers of mobilization. However, the present study extends this literature by demonstrating how escalation unfolds *within* universities that are formally democratic but substantively hierarchical. Engaging participatory governance theory more directly, the findings both affirm and complicate (Fung & Wright, 2003) model of Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG). The successful participatory initiatives observed in selected faculties, such as joint policy discussions and student–staff committees, support the EPG claim that inclusive, deliberative processes can generate trust and reduce conflict (Snijders et al., 2020)(Lo, 2025). These cases also align with (Matthews & Dollinger, 2023) distinction between student representation and student partnership, illustrating that meaningful participation requires shared authority rather than symbolic inclusion. Yet, the broader institutional environment reveals that such initiatives remain fragile and localized, echoing (Rensimer & Brooks, 2025) observation that participatory reforms often exacerbate stratification rather than democratization when not systemically supported.

From a conflict transformation perspective, the findings offer empirical specificity to (Lederach, 2015) theoretical emphasis on inclusion, dialogue, and relational change. This study identifies three escalation thresholds, non-response to petitions, avoidance of dialogue, and securitization, that transform peaceful activism into confrontation. These mechanisms demonstrate how conflict is produced through governance failures rather than student aggression. (Kester & Misiaszek, 2025) work on teaching conflict for peace reinforces this interpretation, emphasizing that higher education institutions bear ethical responsibility for modeling democratic conflict resolution. When universities fail to embody these principles, they risk reproducing cycles of violence rather than fostering democratic learning. Then, the Indonesian case also contributes to broader debates on student engagement and belonging. Prior research demonstrates that students' sense of belonging is closely linked to institutional responsiveness and recognition (Ahn & Davis, 2020)(Mtshweni, 2024). The present findings extend this work by showing that governance participation functions as a macro-level condition for belonging. When students perceive participation as tokenistic, their sense of institutional attachment erodes, increasing the likelihood of disengagement or protest. This insight expands (Kuh, 2001) framework by positioning engagement not only as a learning-related construct but as a governance practice essential to institutional legitimacy and stability (Bowden et al., 2021)(Ahadiyah et al., 2024; Ayyubi et al., 2025; Humaida et al., 2026; Mukhoiyaroh et al., 2025).

Importantly, the study introduces a Global South perspective that challenges the universal applicability of Western participation models. While European universities have institutionalized student unions as legitimate governance partners (Klemenčič, 2012), Indonesian universities face the dual challenge of democratizing governance while dismantling entrenched bureaucratic hierarchies. This tension produces what can be described as a *participatory paradox*, in which democratic ideals are codified in law but constrained in practice. Similar paradoxes have been observed in other transitional societies, where educational institutions reflect broader struggles over democratic consolidation (UNESCO, 2023). A key theoretical contribution of this study lies in its reconceptualization of participation as a historically embedded and cyclical process. Rather than assuming linear progress toward inclusion, the findings suggest that failed participation regenerates future dissent through institutional memory. This insight aligns with historical institutionalist perspectives, which emphasize path dependency and the endurance of governance habits over time. By integrating participatory governance theory with conflict transformation and historical institutionalism, the study offers a more context-sensitive framework for understanding student politics in post-authoritarian settings. Practically, the findings underscore that reducing campus conflict requires moving beyond symbolic consultation toward genuine power-sharing arrangements. Evidence from participatory experiments within this study echoes broader findings that co-design, transparency, and accountability enhance legitimacy and trust (Porchak et al., 2025) (Lee, 2025). Such measures are not merely instrumental but normative, cultivating students as democratic subjects rather than passive recipients of policy. As (Shor, 2002) argues, education is inherently political; universities that deny students meaningful voice risk reproducing authoritarian relations rather than democratic citizenship. To enhance clarity and synthesize the key discussion outcomes, Table 3 summarizes how empirical findings relate to theoretical frameworks and prior studies.

Table 3. *Alignment between Empirical Findings, Theoretical Frameworks, and Prior Studies*

Empirical Finding	Structural and Cultural Explanation	Relevant Theoretical Frameworks	Key Prior Studies	Contribution of the Present Study
Student participation is formally institutionalized but substantively marginalized	Governance structures privilege administrative authority; participation framed as	Participatory Governance; Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG)	(Fung & Wright, 2003); (Klemenčič, 2012)(Klemenčič, 2024); (Matthews & Dollinger, 2023)	Demonstrates how participatory mechanisms operate as symbolic inclusion in post-

	consultation rather than shared decision-making			authoritarian universities, extending participatory governance theory to Global South higher education
Democratic reforms coexist with top-down decision-making	Historical legacies of bureaucratic authoritarianism shape contemporary governance practices	Historical Institutionalism; Post-authoritarian Governance	(Altbach, 2006); (Logli, 2016); (Adiprasetyo, 2025); (Achruah & Sukirman, 2024)	Shows how authoritarian administrative habitus persists despite democratic legal frameworks, producing hybrid governance systems
Ignored student petitions and delayed responses escalate protest	Institutional unresponsiveness erodes trust and delegitimizes formal participation channels	Conflict Transformation; Political Process Theory	(Lederach, 2015); (Feinberg & Salehyan, 2025); (Ancelovici & Guzmán-Concha, 2019)	Identifies concrete escalation thresholds linking governance failure to campus conflict, refining conflict transformation theory for higher education contexts
Tokenistic consultation intensifies student frustration and distrust	Participation is decoupled from power, reinforcing perceptions of manipulation	Illusion of Influence; Organizational Power	(Pfeffer & Cialdini, 2016); (Bowden et al., 2021); (Lo, 2025)	Explains how symbolic participation contributes to cyclical protest rather than stability, advancing organizational power theory in educational settings
Faculty-level participatory initiatives reduce tension and build trust	Localized power-sharing enables deliberation, recognition, and co-production	Empowered Participatory Governance; Dialogic Education	(Fung & Wright, 2003); (Freire, 1970); (Snijders et al., 2020); (Ahn & Davis, 2020)	Demonstrates that meaningful participation can function as both a governance and pedagogical mechanism for conflict prevention
Student-informed policy design increases legitimacy and compliance	Recognition and voice enhance belonging and institutional attachment	Student Engagement; Sense of Belonging	(Kuh, 2001); (Ahn & Davis, 2020); (Mtshweni, 2024); (Pedro et al., 2025)	Extends student engagement theory by positioning governance participation as central to legitimacy and democratic stability
Cyclical patterns of protest follow	Institutional memory reproduces	Historical Institutionalism;	(Altbach, 2006); (Morgan & Davis,	Proposes a cyclical model of

failed participation	distrust across student cohorts	Democratic Transition Theory	2019); (Pedro et al., 2025)	participation and dissent, challenging linear assumptions of democratic consolidation in higher education
Universities mirror broader national democratic tensions	Higher education institutions reproduce state-level power relations	Critical Political Sociology of Education	(UNESCO, 2023); (Verma, 2025); (Kester & Misiaszek, 2025)	Positions universities as microcosms of post-authoritarian democracy, contributing a Global South lens to governance theory

In sum, this study advances scholarship on higher education governance by demonstrating that student participation is not a technical feature of institutional design but a contested political process shaped by history, culture, and power. By grounding participatory theory in the lived realities of Indonesian universities, the study contributes a Global South corrective to dominant models of governance and student engagement. It shows that authentic participation, when institutionalized through shared authority, dialogic practice, and accountability, can transform conflict into collaboration and position universities as active sites of democratic renewal rather than passive reflectors of authoritarian legacy.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that campus conflict in Indonesian higher education is best understood as a governance problem rather than a behavioral problem of student activism. The findings show a recurring pattern in which the exclusion of students from meaningful decision-making, particularly on policies affecting their academic and financial lives, generates frustration that escalates from peaceful protest into confrontation when institutional responses are dismissive or coercive. Violence, therefore, is not an inherent feature of student activism but a predictable outcome of symbolic participation, ignored petitions, avoided dialogue, and securitized administrative responses. At the same time, the study identifies clear counterexamples: collaborative governance practices that integrate student input into policy deliberation were associated with reduced tension, higher trust, and more stable campus relations. These findings directly address the gap in existing literature by specifying how and why governance failures, rather than protest itself, produce campus violence in post-authoritarian university settings.

The study has several limitations. Its focus on a single public university limits the generalizability of the findings, and the analysis is primarily grounded in student perspectives within a participatory governance and conflict transformation framework. Future research could extend this work through comparative multi-campus studies, longitudinal designs examining cycles of protest over time, and deeper engagement with administrative and policy-maker perspectives. Further theoretical development could also integrate political sociology or organizational change theories to better explain resistance to participation within hierarchical institutions. Despite these limitations, the study contributes to broader debates on democratic governance by showing that superficial participation may intensify disillusionment, while genuine power-sharing can transform universities from sites of conflict into spaces of democratic practice. The Indonesian case thus

highlights both the risks of exclusionary governance and the transformative potential of inclusive, dialogic decision-making in higher education.

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