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THE SECURITIZATION OF POLITICAL DISSENT IN INDONESIA'S 17+8 TUNTUTAN RAKYAT PROTEST MOVEMENT

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ABSTRAK
Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis proses sekuritisasi Gerakan 17+8 Tuntutan Rakyat oleh negara Indonesia pada Agustus–September 2025 serta mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang mendorong proses tersebut. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengandesain studi kasus tunggal serta memadukan process tracing dan analisis wacana untuk menelusuri hubungan antara tekanan legitimasi institusional, mobilisasi kolektif, konstruksi ancaman, dan respons keamanan negara. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Gerakan 17+8 berkembang melalui akumulasi keluhan ekonomi, politik, dan institusional di tengah kesenjangan legitimasi pada institusi representatif. Ketika mobilisasi meluas, aktor negara membangun pemisahan antara aspirasi damai dan tindakan yang dikategorikan sebagai anarki serta ancaman keamanan. Pembingkaian tersebut kemudian diadopsi oleh aparatus keamanan dan diikuti dengan intensifikasi tindakan koersif. Namun, sekuritisasi hanya efektif secara terbatas dalam mengendalikan aksi protes karena tidak menyelesaikan keluhan yang mendasari mobilisasi maupun menghentikan sirkulasi tuntutan melalui jaringan digital. Penelitian ini berargumen bahwa krisis legitimasi merupakan prasyarat bagi sekuritisasi political dissent. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini mengusulkan sekuritisasi sebagai strategi pengelolaan legitimasi (legitimacy management strategy) yang memungkinkan negara mempertahankan kapasitas kontrol dalam jangka pendek, tetapi tidak cukup untuk menghasilkan stabilitas politik yang berkelanjutan di tengah democratic backsliding dan mobilisasi digital.

Kata kunci: Sekuritisasi; Legitimasi Politik; Mobilisasi Digital; *Political Dissent*; *Democratic Backsliding*

ABSTRACT
This study aims to analyze the process of securitization of the 17+8 People's Demands Movement by the Indonesian state in August–September 2025 and to identify the factors driving this process. The study employs a qualitative approach with a single-case study design, combining process tracing and discourse analysis to trace the relationship between institutional legitimacy pressures, collective mobilization, threat construction, and the state's security response. The findings show that the 17+8 Movement developed through the accumulation of economic, political, and institutional grievances amid a legitimacy gap in representative institutions. As mobilization expanded, state actors constructed a distinction between peaceful aspirations and actions categorized as anarchy and security threats. This framing was subsequently adopted by security apparatuses and followed by an intensification of coercive measures. However, securitization was only partially effective in controlling protests because it neither addressed the underlying grievances driving mobilization nor halted the circulation of demands through digital networks. This study argues that a legitimacy crisis constitutes a precondition for the securitization of political dissent. Theoretically, it conceptualizes securitization as a legitimacy management strategy that enables the state to maintain its capacity for control in the short term but remains insufficient to produce sustainable political stability amid democratic backsliding and digital mobilization.

Keywords: *Securitization; Political Dissent; Political Legitimacy; Digital Mobilization; Democratic Backsliding*

INTRODUCTION

Protest constitutes an essential component of democratic life by providing citizens with a channel to express grievances, challenge public policies, and demand political accountability. Nevertheless, states do not always manage political mobilization through dialogue or routine political mechanisms. Under certain conditions, collective mobilization may be framed as a source of disorder requiring security intervention. Eves (2025) argues that framing protest as a security issue legitimizes restrictive policies toward collective action. More broadly, security-oriented approaches to social movements increasingly encompass surveillance, information control, and various forms of digital repression that expand the state's capacity to govern dissent (Earl et al., 2022). Consequently, the governance of political dissent should be understood not merely as a matter of public order but as a political process through which collective mobilization is shifted from the arena of democratic contestation into the realm of security governance.

Indonesia provides a relevant context for examining this dynamic through the nationwide protest wave of August–September 2025 and the emergence of the 17+8 People's Demands Movement. Wijaya & Jayasuriya (2026) situate the 2025 demonstrations within the broader context of economic pressures, a crisis of social reproduction, and the increasing militarization of state governance. The movement subsequently consolidated seventeen short-term demands and eight long-term reform agendas addressing economic conditions, institutional reform, security sector accountability, and the military's role in civilian affairs (Pamungkas, 2025). Mobilization developed through networks of civil society organizations, student groups, labor unions, and digital activists without relying on a centralized leadership structure. This pattern reflects the broader trajectory of digital activism in Indonesia over the past decade, during which digital platforms have increasingly facilitated collective action and accelerated the diffusion of political agendas (Abdulrohim et al., 2025).

As demonstrations expanded, the government's response increasingly emphasized stability and public order. In his official statement on 31 August 2025, President Prabowo Subianto affirmed that the government respected peaceful public expression and the constitutional right to freedom of opinion. However, in the same statement, he instructed the Indonesian National Police (Polri) and the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) to take firm action against vandalism, looting, and other acts deemed unlawful (Sekretariat Kabinet, 2025). During the same period, the deployment of security personnel and the number of arrests increased substantially. Human Right Watch (2025) reported that more than 3,000 individuals had been detained since late August and documented the involvement of the military in managing public demonstrations. These developments reveal a tension between recognizing protest as a legitimate form of political expression and the expanding use of security instruments to govern collective mobilization.

This phenomenon raises an important analytical question because the existence of protest does not automatically generate a security response. The nature of protesters' demands and the broader political context may shape how states respond to political dissent. Human Right Watch (2025) suggests that the issues advanced by social movements must be understood alongside the regime's political legitimacy when explaining state decisions to employ repression. In Indonesia, democratic backsliding over recent years has likewise been accompanied by increasing restrictions on civic space and freedom of expression. Sihidi (2025) demonstrates that the evolution of digital repression in Indonesia reflects a broader tendency toward digital authoritarianism. These developments raise the question of why governments choose to manage particular forms of collective mobilization through security approaches rather than through existing democratic and political mechanisms.

The study of securitization has evolved beyond traditional security issues and is increasingly employed to explain how political dissent and civic space become embedded within a logic of threat. Mulvey (2025), for example, demonstrates how processes of ideological securitization transform dissent into a security concern requiring institutional control. Similarly, Eves (2025) develops the concept of protest strand securitization to explain how protests are constructed as sources of social disorder, thereby legitimizing restrictions on collective action. Nevertheless, the relationship between political legitimacy crises, expanding collective mobilization, and the securitization of political dissent remains insufficiently understood, particularly within the context of hybrid democracies in Southeast Asia. Research on digital repression further suggests that the relationship between repression and mobilization is not linear, as state control may simultaneously generate deterrent effects and stimulate new forms of resistance (Earl et al., 2022).

Addressing this gap, this article aims to analyze how the Indonesian government securitized the 17+8 People's Demands Movement and how the political legitimacy crisis shaped this process within the context of a hybrid democracy. This study argues that the securitization process cannot be explained solely as a response to objective security threats. Rather, it developed within a broader context of accumulated public grievances and mounting pressures on institutional legitimacy, prompting the state to shift the governance of political dissent from the arena of democratic contestation toward security governance. Within this context, framing collective mobilization as a threat to stability and public order provided the political justification for expanding the use of security instruments.

This article makes two principal contributions. Empirically, it explains how the 17+8 People's Demands Movement became securitized through processes of threat construction and the expansion of state security responses. Theoretically, it integrates Securitization Theory with scholarship on political legitimacy, hybrid democracy, and digital mobilization to demonstrate that legitimacy crises can function as an antecedent condition for the securitization of political dissent. The study further argues that although securitization may strengthen the state's capacity to suppress the physical manifestations of protest in the short term, its effectiveness remains constrained by the persistence of underlying political grievances and the capacity of digital networks to sustain and reproduce collective mobilization.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach with a single-case study design to examine the securitization of the 17+8 People's Demands Movement in Indonesia during the period of August–September 2025. A single-case design was selected because the study focuses on a specific political episode to explain the processes and mechanisms linking institutional legitimacy pressures, collective mobilization, and the state's shift toward a security-oriented response. Within a single-case study, process tracing enables the use of within-case evidence to explain specific outcomes and assess the causal relationships proposed in the analytical framework (De Ville et al., 2023). The case was purposively selected because it brought together cross-sectoral mobilization, the expansion of state security narratives, and institutional security responses within a single sequence of events, providing a suitable case for examining the securitization of political dissent.

Analytical Framework

Securitization Theory. This study employs Securitization Theory as its primary analytical framework to explain how political dissent is transformed into a matter of security. Rather than treating security as an objective condition, the Copenhagen School argues that an issue becomes a security concern when it is constructed as an existential threat requiring urgent action beyond ordinary political procedures (Buzan et al., 1998). Accordingly, security is understood as the product of social and political construction rather than the objective existence of threats.

Within this perspective, securitization begins with a securitizing move, through which actors possessing political authority frame a particular issue as a threat to a referent object requiring protection Wæver (1995). However, the articulation of security narratives alone does not guarantee successful securitization. Balzacq (2011) emphasizes that securitization depends on the interaction between the securitizing actor, the audience, and the broader socio-political context. Consequently, audience acceptance may be reflected not only through public support but also through institutional endorsement that legitimizes the implementation of security measures.

More recent scholarship has expanded securitization beyond speech acts by emphasizing the role of institutional practices and security governance. Bigo (2002) argues that security is reproduced through professional routines, surveillance, and administrative practices that gradually extend state intervention into social and political life. Likewise, Huysmans (2014) demonstrates that public issues increasingly become governed through security rationalities rather than ordinary political processes. In the context of protest politics, framing collective mobilization as a threat to public order legitimizes expanded state intervention and restrictions on collective action (Eves, 2025).

Building upon these developments, this study applies securitization theory to examine how the 17+8 People's Demands Movement was transformed from democratic political contestation into an issue of security governance. The analysis is structured around five analytical categories: securitizing actor, threat construction, referent object, audience acceptance, and extraordinary measures. These categories are used to identify the production of security narratives, examine how political mobilization was represented as a threat, identify the political or institutional objects claimed to require protection, assess institutional acceptance of security discourse, and trace the translation of threat constructions into expanded security practices.

Political Legitimacy and Hybrid Democracy. To explain why states securitize political dissent, this study complements Securitization Theory with the concept of political legitimacy as the broader political context shaping state responses. Political legitimacy refers to the acceptance of an authority's right to govern. According to Beetham (1991), political authority is legitimate when it is exercised in accordance with established rules, justified through shared beliefs, and supported by the consent of those being governed. Legitimacy is therefore dynamic rather than fixed, depending on the continued ability of political institutions to sustain the normative foundations of their authority. More recent scholarship similarly conceptualizes legitimacy and delegitimation as processes through which the rightfulness of political authority is continuously constructed and contested (Tallberg & Zürn, 2019).

In this study, a legitimacy crisis is understood as a condition in which declining public trust, dissatisfaction with government performance, and weakening confidence in representative institutions increase pressure on state authority. Under such conditions, political demands are more likely to be expressed through collective mobilization outside formal institutional channels. Keremoğlu et al. (2022) argue that state decisions to repress protest are

influenced not only by the existence of mobilization but also by the issues being contested and the regime's need to preserve its legitimacy. Security-oriented responses should therefore be understood as political choices shaped by legitimacy pressures rather than automatic reactions to objective threats.

This relationship becomes particularly relevant in contexts of democratic backsliding, where democratic institutions formally persist while accountability, political competition, and institutional oversight gradually deteriorate. Daly (2025) argues that democratic erosion may occur without abolishing democratic institutions, whereas Petlach & Říčanová (2025) identify Indonesia's recent democratic trajectory as characterized by increasing executive consolidation and institutional weakening. Such conditions produce the characteristics of a hybrid democracy, in which electoral legitimacy remains intact while substantive democratic quality declines.

Building on this perspective, the study conceptualizes legitimacy crisis as an antecedent condition that increases the likelihood of the securitization of political dissent. Rather than assuming that declining legitimacy automatically produces securitization, the framework argues that legitimacy pressures create political conditions in which dissent is more readily framed through the language of stability, public order, and national security. Political legitimacy therefore serves as the analytical bridge connecting domestic political conditions with the securitization process examined in this study.

Digital Mobilization and Analytical Framework. The expansion of digital media has fundamentally transformed contemporary political mobilization by enabling individuals and groups to build networks, disseminate information, and coordinate collective action beyond formal organizational structures. Bennett & Segerberg (2012) describe this transformation through the concept of connective action, in which participation develops through personalized action frames connected by digital communication networks. Digital media therefore function not merely as communication platforms but as infrastructures that facilitate decentralized forms of collective action.

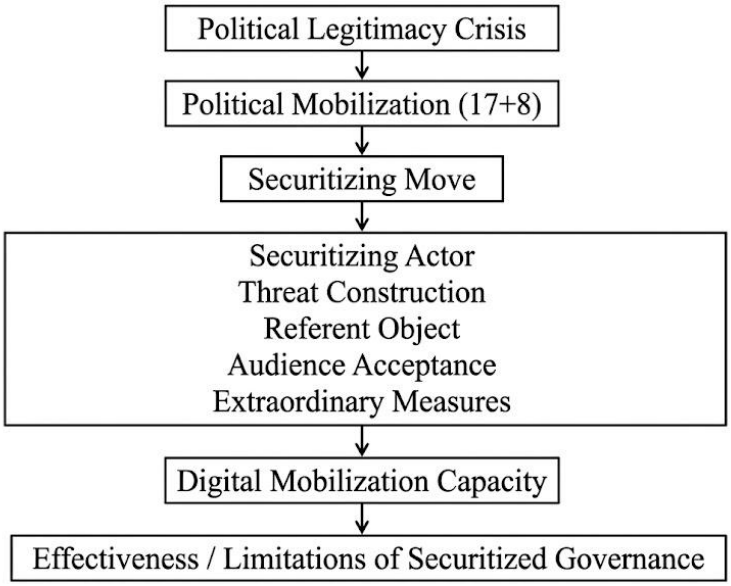
Digital networks also shape the resilience of protest movements under conditions of state repression. Tufekci (2017) argues that digital technologies accelerate coordination and enable movements to achieve large-scale mobilization with fewer organizational resources than traditional social movements. At the same time, digital technologies also expand state capacities for surveillance, information manipulation, and the suppression of collective action (Earl et al., 2022). Consequently, the relationship between mobilization and state control is dynamic: while governments may suppress physical demonstrations, protest networks often adapt through digital communication.

These dynamics are particularly relevant to the Indonesian protest wave of 2025. Abdurrahman (2026) demonstrates that social media played a central role in shaping protest narratives, disseminating political agendas, and coordinating collective action during the August 2025 demonstrations. In this study, digital mobilization is not conceptualized as a direct cause of securitization. Instead, it is treated as a factor that conditions the effectiveness of security governance in containing political dissent. While coercive measures may reduce the physical manifestation of protest, they do not necessarily dismantle the digital communication networks or the political grievances that sustain collective mobilization.

Accordingly, this study integrates Securitization Theory, political legitimacy, hybrid democracy, and digital mobilization into a single analytical framework (Figure 1). Political legitimacy crisis is conceptualized as the antecedent condition shaping the emergence of collective mobilization. As mobilization develops into a perceived

challenge to state authority and political stability, state actors may initiate a securitizing move by constructing political dissent as a security threat. The process is examined through five analytical categories—securitizing actor, threat construction, referent object, audience acceptance, and extraordinary measures—while digital mobilization is incorporated to evaluate the extent to which securitized governance can effectively contain the continuity of networked political dissent.

Figure I: Analytical Framework of the Securitization of Political Dissent



***Source**: Processed by Author (2026)*

As illustrated in Figure I, the framework does not treat legitimacy crisis as a deterministic cause of securitization. Rather, legitimacy pressures shape the political environment in which collective mobilization emerges, whereas the transformation of political dissent into a security issue occurs through a securitizing move. Digital mobilization is positioned as a subsequent dimension that conditions the effectiveness of securitized governance in containing the continuity of political dissent. This integrated framework enables the study to explain how securitization unfolds, why legitimacy pressures influence state responses, and why security-oriented governance encounters limitations when confronting digitally networked collective mobilization.

Data Collection

This study relies on documentary research to collect qualitative data related to the securitization of the 17+8 People's Demands Movement during the August–September 2025 protest cycle. Documentary sources were selected because they provide evidence of state narratives, institutional responses, collective mobilization, and the broader political context in which securitization unfolded. Using documentary evidence enables the reconstruction of political processes while incorporating perspectives from both official institutions and independent observers.

Table I. Summary of Data Sources

Data Source	Examples	Analytical Purpose
Securitizing actor	Presidential speeches, government statements, publications from the Government, Polri, TNI, and the House of Representatives (DPR)	To identify securitizing actors, threat narratives, official framing, and institutional responses.

Threat construction	Reports published by Amnesty International Indonesia, Human Rights Watch, KontraS, and other civil society organizations	To document security practices, allegations of excessive force, and independent assessments of state responses.
Referent object	Survey reports from institutions such as Indikator Politik Indonesia	To examine the legitimacy context and public trust in representative institutions prior to the protests.
Audience acceptance	National and international news reports (e.g., Reuters, Associated Press, Kompas)	To reconstruct the chronology of protest events and trace the evolution of collective mobilization.
Extraordinary measures	Peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books	To contextualize the case within existing literature and support theoretical interpretation.

***Source**: Processed by Author (2026)*

As summarized in Table I, the dataset combines official documents, independent reports, media coverage, public opinion surveys, and academic publications to capture multiple dimensions of the securitization process. This diversity of sources enables the study to reconstruct the sequence of events, examine how threat narratives were articulated by state actors, assess institutional responses to collective mobilization, and situate empirical findings within broader scholarly debates. Combining multiple sources also enhances analytical credibility through source triangulation, allowing evidence to be corroborated across different producers of information while reducing dependence on any single source (Schlunegger et al., 2024).

Documents were selected through purposive sampling based on their temporal and analytical relevance to the August–September 2025 protest wave. To be included in the dataset, a document had to contain at least one of four types of information: (1) threat narratives articulated by state actors; (2) institutional responses to collective mobilization; (3) security practices implemented during the management of protests; or (4) evidence concerning the grievances, organization, and development of the 17+8 People's Demands Movement. Documents that merely reproduced identical information without providing additional empirical evidence were excluded from the primary analysis.

The unit of analysis consists of documented official statements, institutional responses, and security practices that correspond to the analytical framework developed in this study. These materials provide empirical evidence for examining how political dissent was reframed through security discourse and translated into institutional practices. Evidence from different document categories was systematically compared through source triangulation to identify convergent as well as divergent findings, thereby strengthening the reliability and credibility of the analysis (Schlunegger et al., 2024).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through a combination of process tracing and qualitative discourse analysis. These complementary approaches enabled the study to examine both the sequence of political developments leading to securitization and the discursive construction of political dissent as a security issue.

The first stage employed process tracing to reconstruct the causal mechanism linking the legitimacy crisis, the emergence of the 17+8 People's Demands Movement, changes in government framing, and the subsequent expansion of state security responses. Rather than merely establishing a chronological sequence of events, process tracing was used to identify the causal processes through which political grievances evolved into a securitized issue. Particular attention was given to evidence indicating the transition from the management of political demands through ordinary democratic mechanisms to the adoption of security-oriented governance

emphasizing stability, public order, and national security. This approach is consistent with the role of process tracing in identifying causal mechanisms within single-case studies (Pickering, 2022).

The second stage employed qualitative discourse analysis to examine official statements, speeches, press releases, and institutional communications issued by state authorities. The analysis focused on identifying the use of security-related language, including narratives of threats, stability, public order, anarchy, and the protection of state interests. Rather than analyzing isolated words or phrases, these discursive constructions were interpreted within their broader political context and linked to subsequent institutional responses. This approach enabled the study to assess how security narratives contributed to legitimizing the expansion of security practices toward political dissent.

Data coding followed a deductive coding strategy, in which the analytical categories were derived directly from the theoretical framework (Alyaqoub et al., 2024). Documentary evidence was systematically classified into five categories of securitization: securitizing actor, threat construction, referent object, audience acceptance, and extraordinary measures. These categories provided a structured framework for examining how state actors constructed security narratives, identified the objects requiring protection, secured institutional acceptance, and translated these narratives into expanded security measures.

Table II. Analytical Categories of Securitization

Analytical Category	Analytical Focus
Securitizing actor	Identifies state actors responsible for producing or reinforcing security narratives.
Threat construction	Examines how political mobilization is represented as a threat to stability and public order.
Referent object	Identifies the political or institutional objects claimed to require protection.
Audience acceptance	Assesses institutional acceptance of security discourse and its legitimizing function.
Extraordinary measures	Examines how threat constructions are translated into expanded security practices and interventions.

***Source**: Processed by Author (2026)*

Following the coding process, the categorized evidence was reassembled chronologically to evaluate the relationship between legitimacy pressures and the securitization process. Finally, digital mobilization was analyzed as a distinct analytical dimension to assess the effectiveness and limitations of securitized governance in containing political dissent. Rather than treating digital mobilization as a cause of securitization, the analysis examined how digitally networked communication enabled collective action to persist despite the expansion of coercive state responses. This final stage allowed the study to evaluate both the immediate effectiveness and the structural limitations of security-oriented governance in managing networked political mobilization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Legitimacy Crisis as the Foundation of Collective Mobilization

The findings indicate that the emergence of the 17+8 People's Demands Movement cannot be explained as a reaction to a single government policy. Rather, the nationwide protest wave that unfolded during August 2025 emerged from the convergence of economic hardship, dissatisfaction with government priorities, and a widening perception of the disconnect between political elites and society. These dynamics occurred not during a period of macroeconomic collapse, but under conditions in which aggregate economic growth coexisted with increasing insecurity among middle-class households and workers. Wijaya & Jayasuriya (2026) characterize the 2025 protests as a manifestation of a broader crisis of social reproduction accompanied by the growing political disconnection of working-class groups from existing power structures. Distributive tensions became particularly

visible when controversy arose over the monthly housing allowance of IDR 50 million allocated to members of the House of Representatives (DPR), despite mounting concerns over the rising cost of living. Consequently, the initial demonstrations on 25 August 2025 centered on public anger toward parliamentary privileges before evolving into a broader expression of political dissatisfaction (Karmini & Ibrahim, 2025).

These findings suggest that the underlying grievance extended beyond economic concerns to encompass a broader crisis of political representation. Public opinion data collected prior to the protest wave demonstrate declining confidence in representative institutions. A survey conducted by Indikator Politik Indonesia reported that public trust in the DPR stood at 69 percent, ranking tenth among eleven national institutions, while political parties occupied the lowest position with only 62 percent public trust (Harbowo, 2025). Rather than indicating a wholesale rejection of the state or government, these findings point to a crisis of institutional legitimacy, characterized by an expanding gap between the formal authority of representative institutions and public perceptions of their capacity to respond to societal interests. Within this political context, controversy surrounding parliamentary privileges acquired greater symbolic significance because it reinforced pre-existing doubts regarding the responsiveness and accountability of representative institutions.

The legitimacy crisis also helps explain why protests initially triggered by a relatively specific issue rapidly evolved into a nationwide, multi-issue mobilization. Reuters reported that demonstrations originally protesting parliamentary housing allowances spread across 32 of Indonesia's 38 provinces, incorporating grievances related to corruption, socioeconomic inequality, and government spending priorities (Petty, 2025). From an analytical perspective, however, it is important to distinguish between the broader protest wave of August 2025 and the subsequent emergence of the 17+8 People's Demands platform. The initial demonstrations developed without centralized leadership, whereas this platform subsequently functioned as an integrative framework that consolidated previously fragmented grievances into a coherent political agenda. It formally articulated 17 short-term demands and eight long-term reform agendas under the collective slogan of "Transparency, Reform, and Empathy" (17+8 Tuntutan Rakyat, 2025). This distinction is analytically significant because the platform initiative should not be understood as the organization that led the protests from the outset, but rather as a political framework that transformed dispersed collective grievances into a unified agenda.

Table III. Aggregated Agendas within the 17+8 People's Demands

Dimension	Main Focus
Economic welfare	Economic policy, taxation, employment, and social protection
Political representation	Parliamentary accountability, legislative privileges, and political party reform
Law and accountability	Investigation of security force violence and strengthening oversight institutions
Security sector reform	Police reform and reassessment of the military's role in civilian governance
Institutional reform	Anti-corruption measures and strengthening institutional independence
Civil rights	Protection of demonstrators and civil liberties

***Source**: Processed by Author (2026)*

The findings further demonstrate that this transformation fundamentally altered the character of political dissent during the August–September 2025 protest cycle. Demands concerning economic welfare, political accountability, police reform, civil-military relations, and democratic institutional reform no longer functioned as isolated sectoral issues. Instead, they were integrated into a shared political framework through this platform. Arintyas et al. (2026) argue that digital mobilization played a crucial role in converting dispersed public

dissatisfaction into a more coherent political agenda. This finding is consistent with previous studies of Indonesian digital activism, which show that interactions between online and offline mobilization enable young people and civil society networks to expand political participation beyond conventional institutional channels (Wahyuningroem et al., 2023). Consequently, the movement strength derived not merely from the number of protesters participating in demonstrations, but from the capacity of digital networks to connect heterogeneous grievances into a portable political frame that could be reproduced and adapted across diverse social groups.

Overall, the findings indicate that the 17+8 People's Demands Movement did not emerge from a single policy dispute or isolated political event. Rather, it developed through the interaction of economic vulnerability, perceptions of distributive inequality, and a widening crisis of representative legitimacy that weakened public confidence in existing political institutions. Under these conditions, collective action became an alternative channel for articulating fragmented grievances that were no longer perceived as adequately represented through formal political mechanisms. From the perspective of the analytical framework developed in this study, this legitimacy crisis should not be interpreted as the erosion of support for the Indonesian state as a whole, but rather as the weakening of institutional legitimacy within representative and governance structures. As argued in the theoretical framework, this crisis of institutional legitimacy functioned as the antecedent condition that facilitated the expansion of collective mobilization and created the political context in which the state increasingly shifted from conventional political management toward a securitized approach emphasizing stability and public order.

Securitizing the 17+8 People's Demands Movement

The expansion of nationwide protests in late August 2025 was accompanied by a significant transformation in the state's understanding of public mobilization. While the initial protests centered on parliamentary privileges, economic hardship, and institutional accountability, the escalation of demonstrations gradually redirected government attention toward issues of public order and national stability. This shift became increasingly evident as protests spread across 32 of Indonesia's 38 provinces, with several demonstrations involving clashes, arson, and damage to public facilities (Petty, 2025). Within this context, the state no longer confronted merely a collection of political demands but began distinguishing between legitimate expressions of dissent and actions framed as threats to society and the state. This categorical transformation marked a critical stage in the securitization of the 17+8 People's Demands Movement.

To reconstruct this process, this study traces the sequence linking legitimacy pressures, the expansion of collective mobilization, and the state's transition toward a security-oriented response. The evidence indicates that the securitizing move did not precede collective action but emerged only after the scale of protests expanded and confrontations between demonstrators and security forces generated new political pressures. The reconstructed causal sequence is summarized in Table IV.

Table IV. Process-Tracing Evidence of the Securitization of the 17+8 People's Demands Movement

Process Stage	Observed Event	Analytical Significance
Legitimacy pressure	Accumulation of economic grievances and declining trust in representative institutions	Created antecedent conditions increasing susceptibility to collective mobilization
Mobilization trigger	Controversy surrounding parliamentary privileges and housing allowances	Activated previously dispersed grievances
Protest expansion	Demonstrations spread across multiple social groups and provinces	Transformed sectoral dissent into a nationwide political challenge

Coercive escalation	Violent confrontations and the death of Affan Kurniawan	Generated moral shock and intensified collective grievances
Securitizing move	Presidential statement on 31 August invoking anarchy, treason, and terrorism	Shifted protest framing toward the language of security threats
Security operationalization	Intensified deployment of the National Police and Armed Forces	Translated political authorization into security governance practices
Coercive intensification	Large-scale arrests and allegations of excessive force	Demonstrated the expansion of coercive state responses
Selective accomodation	Parliament announced six policy responses addressing selected 17+8 demands	Indicated that security measures coexisted with limited political concessions

***Source**: Processed by Author (2026)*

The principal securitizing actor was President Prabowo Subianto, who, as head of the executive, possessed the political authority to redefine the meaning of the escalating protests. In his official statement on 31 August 2025, the President first reaffirmed constitutional guarantees of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. However, the discourse subsequently shifted through progressively stronger security categories, moving from references to "anarchy" and "unlawful acts" toward actions allegedly "leading to treason and terrorism" (Sekretariat Negara Republik Indonesia, 2025). Analytically, this lexical shift established a boundary between legitimate political dissent and conduct portrayed as exceeding the limits of normal democratic contestation. Furthermore, presidential instructions directing the National Police (Polri) and the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) to take firm action against vandalism, looting, and threats to public security demonstrate that the President not only constructed the threat narrative but also provided the political authorization for its operational implementation.

Within this configuration, Polri and TNI are more appropriately conceptualized as operational security actors rather than primary securitizing actors. The National Police translated the security framing into law enforcement and crowd-control operations, while the deployment of the military expanded the state's institutional capacity to manage protest escalation. Military involvement occurred in support of police operations and remained in place until authorities considered the security situation under control. This division of responsibilities illustrates a distinction between the production and political authorization of security narratives at the executive level and the practical implementation of security governance by state institutions. Accordingly, the securitization of the movement did not require every institution to function as a securitizing actor; instead, it demonstrates how a securitizing move initiated by political leadership acquired operational capacity through security institutions.

Threat construction primarily relied on separating peaceful political aspirations from actions categorized as anarchy and threats to national security. Presidential discourse did not explicitly portray the 17+8 People's Demands Movement itself as the security threat. Rather, the threat was defined as the transformation of demonstrations into activities allegedly endangering public safety, public infrastructure, and national security (Sekretariat Negara Republik Indonesia, 2025). Consequently, this study finds insufficient evidence to conclude that the government formally defined the movement as either a terrorist organization or a treasonous movement. Instead, the process was more nuanced: the boundary between legitimate protest and security threat was constructed through the categorization of the forms, escalation, and consequences of collective mobilization. Nevertheless, the invocation of "treason" and "terrorism" within the context of nationwide protests significantly expanded the interpretive space through which political dissent could be viewed as a security issue. Ifan et al. (2025) similarly argue that the use of legal categories and security language in Indonesia can function as a

mechanism for shifting political criticism from the realm of democratic contestation into questions of public order and state authority.

Based on this construction, the principal referent objects consisted of public safety, public order, public infrastructure, and national stability. The presidential statement explicitly justified law enforcement measures as necessary to protect citizens and public facilities (Sekretariat Negara Republik Indonesia, 2025). Simultaneously, the economic consequences of escalating protests broadened the meaning of stability at stake. Civil unrest placed pressure on financial markets and the Indonesian rupiah while increasing concerns regarding investor confidence (Sulaiman & Suroyo, 2025). However, these economic effects should be interpreted cautiously. Investor confidence is more appropriately understood as a consequence reinforcing the perceived urgency of maintaining stability rather than as a referent object consistently articulated within the President's speech acts. Accordingly, the primary referent objects remained public order, public safety, and national stability, while economic continuity constituted a secondary consideration within the broader securitization process.

Audience acceptance represents the most complex element of the securitization process. In this case, acceptance cannot be equated with uniform public endorsement of the government's security narrative. Instead, it should be examined among audiences possessing the institutional capacity either to enable or constrain the implementation of security measures. Securitization scholarship emphasizes that audiences are multiple and that acceptance is rarely a binary outcome but rather develops through iterative political interactions between securitizing actors and relevant audiences (Salter, 2008). In the case of the 17+8 movement, the most relevant indicator of audience acceptance lies in the absence of effective institutional resistance to the expansion of security responses following the framing of protests through the language of anarchy, public order, and national stability. Political authorization for firm action against acts categorized as anarchic was subsequently followed by intensified policing and legal prosecution of demonstrators. This pattern reflects a form of institutional permissiveness: rather than explicit endorsement of every element of the government's threat construction, state institutions allowed the security logic to be translated into practices of protest management.

The response of the House of Representatives (DPR) should be analytically distinguished from this process. The six policy decisions announced by Parliament on 5 September 2025 are more appropriately interpreted as selective policy accommodation in response to political pressure from the movement rather than as evidence of audience acceptance (Wandi, 2025). This distinction illustrates that two state responses unfolded simultaneously: selected demands were addressed through institutional concessions, while the escalating protests continued to be managed through security instruments. Consequently, the securitization of the 17+8 movement did not generate homogeneous audience acceptance. Instead, the findings reveal a configuration of limited institutional acceptance, whereby the security logic gained operational legitimacy without eliminating the political pressures that compelled the state to offer selective concessions.

This operational acceptance became most visible through the implementation of extraordinary measures. Human Rights Watch reported that more than 3,000 individuals were detained during nationwide security operations beginning in late August 2025 and documented allegations of excessive force and the use of tear gas against demonstrators (Human Right Watch, 2025). Additional evidence compiled in this study also recorded the deployment of water cannons at close range, physical assaults, and repeated use of tear gas grenades based on video verification conducted by Amnesty International Indonesia. The involvement of the Indonesian military in

civilian protest management further illustrates the expansion of security institutions into the governance of political conflict. Collectively, these measures should not be interpreted as implying that every instance of law enforcement automatically constitutes an extraordinary measure. Rather, their analytical significance lies in the scale, intensity, and configuration of coercive responses that followed the reframing of collective mobilization from political demands into matters of national security. The overall securitization process is summarized in Table V.

Table V. Mapping the Securitization Process of the 17+8 People's Demands Movement

Securitization Element	Empirical Findings
Securitizing actor	President as the primary securitizing actor providing political authorization; Polri and TNI as operational security actors implementing security governance
Threat construction	Protest escalation distinguished from peaceful aspirations and framed through the categories of anarchy, unlawful acts, treason, and terrorism
Referent object	Public safety, public order, public infrastructure, and national stability
Audience acceptance	Institutional permissiveness enabling security implementation, while public opinion remained contested and Parliament pursued selective policy accommodation
Extraordinary measures	Intensified crowd-control operations, large-scale arrests, allegations of excessive force, and military involvement in civilian security operations

***Source**: Processed by Author (2026)*

Overall, these findings demonstrate that the securitization of the 17+8 People's Demands Movement did not occur through a single speech act explicitly declaring the movement itself a threat to the state. Rather, the process unfolded gradually: escalating mobilization was first differentiated from legitimate political expression, followed by the expansion of security discourse through references to anarchy, treason, and terrorism, and ultimately reinforced through intensified police operations and military involvement. Consequently, the state not only constructed the risks associated with collective mobilization but also acquired the political and institutional space to shift the governance of political dissent from democratic representation toward security governance. In this case, securitization is therefore best understood as a legitimacy management strategy through which the state sought to preserve its capacity for political control as collective mobilization evolved into a nationwide challenge to governmental authority and governance effectiveness.

The Limits of Securitized Governance

Although securitization expanded the state's capacity to manage the escalation of the 17+8 People's Demands Movement through security instruments, its effectiveness remained inherently limited. The intensification of policing and coercive measures was followed by a decline in street demonstrations across several cities. However, the reduction in physical protest activity did not necessarily indicate that the underlying grievances driving collective mobilization had been resolved. While several demands received institutional responses—including revisions concerning parliamentary benefits and commitments to greater transparency—more structural issues remained central to the movement's agenda (Sulistiawati & Afrilia, 2026). Consequently, the success of securitized governance in this case is better understood in terms of its capacity to contain the visible manifestations of protest rather than to address the political conditions that generated collective mobilization.

This limitation is closely related to the networked character of the movement. Arintyas et al. (2026) demonstrate that digital mobilization transformed dispersed online frustration into a coherent platform consisting of 25 reform demands. This finding suggests that digital spaces functioned not merely as channels for information dissemination but also as infrastructures for aggregating political grievances and coordinating collective action.

Such dynamics are consistent with broader patterns of digital activism in Indonesia, where social media has accelerated mobilization, expanded political participation, and strengthened solidarity among younger generations (Nugroho, 2025). Consequently, restricting physical demonstrations does not necessarily eliminate the political capacity of the digital networks sustaining the movement.

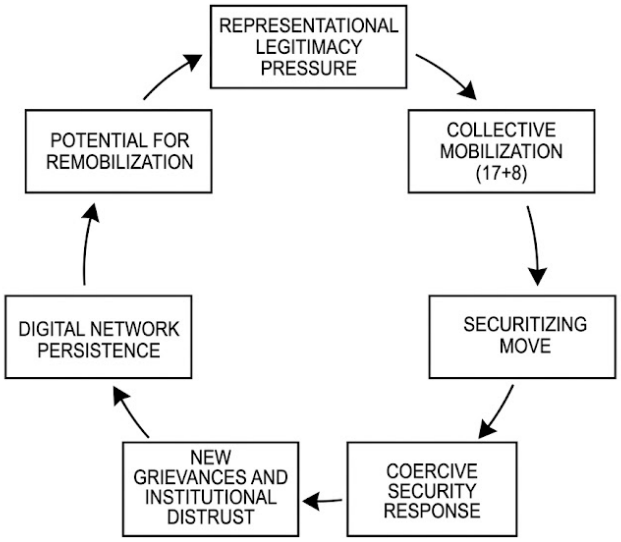
Nevertheless, these findings should not be interpreted as suggesting that digital mobilization renders social movements immune to securitization. Digital spaces also constitute arenas of contestation and state control. Research on Indonesian digital activism highlights the risks of hashtag hijacking, coordinated information campaigns, and online polarization, all of which may disrupt movement narratives and public discourse (Danaditya et al., 2022). Developments following the 2025 protests further illustrate the growing importance of online disinformation in delegitimizing activists and government critics. Amnesty International documented coordinated digital campaigns portraying several critics as "foreign agents", linking these narratives to broader efforts aimed at discrediting political dissent and legitimizing repressive measures (Teresia, 2025). The relationship between digital mobilization and security governance is therefore adaptive rather than one-sided: while digital networks preserve the circulation of dissent, the state and its supporting actors simultaneously develop new instruments of control within the same digital environment.

These dynamics explain why securitization cannot be characterized either as a complete failure or as a strategy capable of producing lasting political stability. Security-oriented approaches may strengthen the state's capacity for short-term control, while limited political concessions may alleviate some immediate pressures. However, the 2025 protests demonstrate that structural inequalities, social vulnerabilities, and the widening disconnect between society and representative institutions cannot be resolved through security measures alone. Wijaya & Jayasuriya (2026) situate the protest wave within a broader crisis of social reproduction and the declining capacity of political institutions to mediate expanding societal grievances. Accordingly, the deployment of security instruments should be understood primarily as a mechanism for managing the political consequences of this legitimacy crisis rather than resolving the structural conditions from which it emerged.

These findings point toward a potentially cyclical relationship between legitimacy pressures, collective mobilization, and securitization. Scholarship on the repression–dissent nexus argues that repression does not necessarily produce demobilization. Although coercive measures may increase the costs of participation and weaken segments of a movement, repression can also generate backfire effects, activating new supporters and stimulating further mobilization under certain conditions (Earl et al., 2022). This mechanism is particularly relevant in the case of the protest, where coercive escalation not only responded to collective protest but also generated new grievances. The death of Affan Kurniawan during the demonstrations became a critical turning point by intensifying public scrutiny of state violence and expanding the movement's demands to include issues of security-sector accountability. Such events may function as moral shocks, whereby visible violence or human suffering generates moral outrage and transforms isolated incidents into catalysts for broader collective mobilization (Grimm & Ahmed, 2025). Consequently, the movement's official platform expanded to include demands for an end to the criminalization of protesters, the withdrawal of the military from civilian security operations, and the establishment of an independent investigation into Affan Kurniawan's death (17+8 Tuntutan Rakyat, 2025). In this sense, the state's security response itself became incorporated into the movement's repertoire of grievances. This study does not claim that repression automatically produces remobilization; rather, it identifies a feedback mechanism through

which coercive measures may generate additional grievances capable of sustaining pressures on institutional legitimacy.

Figure II. Repression–Mobilization Feedback Mechanism in Securitized Governance



***Source**: Processed by Author (2026)*

As illustrated in Figure II, this relationship should not be interpreted as a deterministic cycle. Securitization does not inevitably lead to renewed mobilization, just as repression may successfully weaken a movement under certain conditions. The argument advanced in this study is more limited. When underlying grievances remain unresolved and digital networks continue to sustain the circulation of political demands, coercive responses may generate additional grievances that reinforce pressures on institutional legitimacy. Accordingly, the principal limitation of securitized governance lies in its ability to contain the visible expression of political conflict without necessarily restoring the representative relationships whose deterioration gave rise to that conflict.

These findings contribute to Critical Security Studies by demonstrating that securitization can function as a legitimacy management strategy, rather than merely as a response to objectively defined security threats. Within the context of democratic backsliding, security-oriented governance enables states to preserve their capacity for political control when collective mobilization develops beyond formal representative institutions. However, the movement demonstrates that the effectiveness of this strategy is constrained by two interconnected conditions: the persistence of underlying grievances and the capacity of digital networks to sustain the circulation of dissent. Securitization should therefore be understood primarily as a temporary instrument for managing the political consequences of legitimacy crises rather than as a mechanism capable of resolving the structural roots of democratic contestation.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study contribute to the development of Securitization Theory by demonstrating that securitization is shaped not only by the construction of security threats but also by the political conditions preceding the securitizing move. Existing securitization scholarship primarily focuses on how issues are constructed as existential threats, gain audience acceptance, and subsequently legitimize the adoption of extraordinary measures (Khan & Kaunert, 2026). The case of the 17+8 People's Demands Movement suggests

that this process does not occur within a politically neutral environment. Rather, securitization emerged amid declining institutional legitimacy, where decreasing public trust in representative institutions coincided with the expansion of collective mobilization. Under these circumstances, threat construction functioned not merely as a security discourse but also as a political strategy through which the state sought to preserve its governing capacity and maintain control over escalating political dissent. Accordingly, this study conceptualizes legitimacy pressure as an antecedent condition that increases the likelihood of securitization rather than as an intrinsic component of the securitization process itself. This perspective extends existing analyses by shifting attention from the dynamics of threat construction toward the broader political context that incentivizes states to initiate securitizing moves.

The findings further demonstrate that the effectiveness of securitization is inherently constrained in contexts characterized by democratic backsliding and digitally networked political mobilization. Although security-oriented responses may temporarily enhance the state's capacity to contain protest escalation, they do not automatically resolve the underlying grievances or restore the institutional legitimacy that initially generated collective mobilization (Sihidi, 2025). Instead, digital communication networks enable political grievances to persist, circulate, and be reproduced beyond the physical spaces of protest. Simultaneously, coercive responses may generate additional grievances that reinforce rather than alleviate pressures on state institutions. Consequently, the effectiveness of securitization should not be evaluated solely by its short-term ability to suppress public demonstrations but also by its capacity to address the political conditions sustaining collective dissent over time.

Building upon these findings, this study proposes understanding securitization as a legitimacy management strategy in the governance of political dissent. This concept refers to the strategic deployment of security logic to preserve state authority when declining institutional legitimacy weakens representative channels and political mobilization increasingly develops outside conventional political institutions. Rather than treating legitimacy crises as deterministic causes of securitization, this framework conceptualizes them as political conditions that reshape state incentives in selecting governance strategies for managing dissent. By integrating Securitization Theory, political legitimacy, and digital mobilization into a unified analytical framework, this study expands the scope of securitization research beyond the construction of security threats to incorporate the legitimacy conditions that precede securitization and the governance functions it ultimately serves. Within this perspective, the securitization of political dissent represents not only the politics of threat construction but also the politics of legitimacy management.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the securitization of the 17+8 People's Demands Movement unfolded through a shift in the governance of political dissent from the arena of political contestation to one of security governance. The movement emerged amid the accumulation of economic, political, and institutional grievances, accompanied by declining legitimacy of representative institutions. As the protests expanded, state actors increasingly distinguished peaceful expressions of dissent from actions framed as anarchy and security threats. This securitizing move was reinforced through the language of stability, public order, subversion, and terrorism, and subsequently translated into intensified coercive responses and the expanded involvement of security institutions. These findings suggest that securitization should not be understood merely as a response to objective security threats but also as a strategy through which the state seeks to preserve governing capacity when institutional legitimacy comes under increasing political pressure.

At the same time, the findings demonstrate that securitized governance has inherent limitations in producing sustainable political stability. While security-based responses may temporarily reduce the physical manifestation of protests, they do not automatically address the underlying grievances that drive collective mobilization. Moreover, digitally networked communication enables political demands to persist and circulate beyond physical protest spaces, while coercive measures may generate new grievances that further challenge institutional legitimacy. Based on these findings, this study conceptualizes legitimacy crisis as an antecedent condition that increases the likelihood of securitization and proposes securitization as a legitimacy management strategy for governing political dissent. Future research should examine this argument comparatively across democratic regimes experiencing democratic backsliding to assess the extent to which the relationship between legitimacy pressure, securitization, and digital mobilization can be generalized.

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SHORT PROFILE

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