
Dynamics of Public Communication in the Bangkonol Landfill Conflict, Pandeglang

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Abstract

The conflict over the Bangkonol Landfill (TPA Bangkonol) in Pandeglang Regency, Banten Province, escalated during 2024–2025, involving local government, communities, and the media. This study analyzes the dynamics of public communication by focusing on community resistance, media framing, and the government's crisis response. A qualitative case study was conducted through interviews, document analysis, and media review. Findings indicate that the absence of participatory communication triggered strong community resistance, while the media amplified the dispute by framing it as an environmental crisis and highlighting weak policy legitimacy. These dynamics align with agenda-setting and framing theories, which explain how media influence public opinion. The issue was further politicized by local political rivals, and digital platforms became arenas for mobilization, consistent with uses and gratifications theory. This shows that communication failure not only fueled resistance but also opened space for politicization and accelerated conflict escalation. The study recommends strengthening official communication channels, ensuring community involvement from the planning stage, and expediting the transition of the landfill to a sanitary system.

Keywords: *public communication, media framing, community resistance, crisis communication, Bangkonol landfill*

INTRODUCTION

Waste management has emerged as a global environmental crisis. The World Bank (2018) reported that global waste generation reached 2.01 billion tons annually and is projected to increase by 70 percent by 2050 if systemic reforms are not implemented. Developing countries are more vulnerable because of infrastructural gaps, weak governance, and limited public engagement (Hoornweg & Bhada-Tata, 2012; Wilson et al., 2015). In Indonesia, waste generation is projected to reach 82 million tons by 2045 (UGM, 2025), with most landfills still operating under outdated open dumping systems despite Law No. 18/2008 mandating the transition to sanitary landfill by 2013 (KLHK, 2022; Soewarto, 2021). This condition worsens environmental degradation and greenhouse gas emissions, as studies on Palembang's Sukawinatan landfill confirm (Permatasari, 2025).

Bangkonol Landfill in Pandeglang Regency, Banten Province, exemplifies these challenges. Since 2001, it has operated using open dumping. In 2024–2025, the Pandeglang government entered into a waste management partnership with Serang Regency and South Tangerang City. The policy was resisted by local residents because it lacked public consultation, transparency, and comprehensive environmental impact assessments (Putra, 2022; Wahyudi, 2023). Communities argued that the plan would further damage ecosystems and endanger health (Yang, 2024). Similar reactions to landfill closures in Yogyakarta (Suhardono, 2024) and participatory resistance to waste projects elsewhere in Indonesia (Mulasari, 2024) show that waste governance cannot succeed without community involvement. Research also highlights that plastic waste and urban pollution continue to challenge Indonesian cities, requiring new political and policy frameworks (Komarudin & Ayuningtyas, 2024; Zahrah, 2024; Mongabay, 2025; Iacovidou et al., 2025).

The Bangkonol case demonstrates how local technical problems escalate into political controversies through media and public discourse. Mainstream media framed the issue as both an environmental crisis and a failure of governance legitimacy (Entman, 1993; Eriyanto, 2011; Sulkhan, 2022). Studies on climate change discourse in Indonesia (Nugrahani et al., 2022), renewable energy debates (Lalitha & Hassan, 2024), and the framing of new capital city development by activists (Azalia, 2025) confirm the significant role of framing in shaping public perception. Comparative research on transboundary haze disputes (Rochyadi-Reetz et al., 2020) also highlights the media's role in amplifying conflict. Beyond traditional media, digital platforms serve as spaces for mobilization and advocacy, consistent with uses and gratifications theory (Kibanov et al., 2017; Marx et al., 2020; Taufiq, 2025).

Weak communication by local authorities intensified the conflict. Agenda-setting theory explains how the issue entered the public priority list (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Severin & Tankard, 2014). Framing theory highlights how narratives of environmental crisis delegitimized government actions (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Crisis communication studies emphasize the need for rapid, dialogical, and transparent strategies to sustain legitimacy (Coombs, 2015; Hasanah & Destrity, 2024; Rezeki et al., 2025; Simanjuntak & Noer, 2024). Poor communication not only risks escalating local protests but also contributes to crisis fatigue among citizens when exposed to constant environmental disputes (Samet, 2025).

Previous research on waste management in Indonesia often emphasized technical aspects, such as engineering solutions and infrastructure (Sari, 2023; Dewanto & Asy'ari, 2023; Suryandari, 2023). Fewer studies examined the integration of community resistance, media framing, and government crisis response (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Habermas, 1989; Sulastri, 2024; Susjono & Sufyanto, 2024). Recent work has stressed collaborative governance and citizen participation as critical to resolving urban waste problems (Valentina et al., 2025).

This study seeks to fill that gap by analyzing the dynamics of public communication in the Bangkonol landfill conflict. Its objectives are: (1) to describe the dynamics of public communication in the conflict, (2) to analyze how the media framed the Bangkonol issue, and (3) to evaluate the local government's crisis communication response. Theoretically, this study contributes to public communication scholarship by showing how the interaction between media, citizens, and government transforms technical waste issues into broader political conflicts (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Habermas, 1989; Valentina et al., 2025). Practically, it offers recommendations for participatory, transparent, and dialogical communication strategies that can strengthen legitimacy and prevent escalation of similar conflicts in the future.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design. The approach was chosen to allow an in-depth exploration of the dynamics of public communication surrounding the Bangkonol landfill conflict. A case study is particularly suitable for examining complex social phenomena within their real-life context, especially when multiple actors and perspectives are involved (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Data were collected from three primary sources. The first consisted of media coverage, including online, print, and broadcast news published between 2024 and 2025. These materials were reviewed to identify how the conflict was framed in different outlets (Eriyanto, 2011; Azalia, 2025). The second source was in-depth interviews with 15 key informants selected through purposive sampling. Participants included local government officials, journalists, environmental activists, and affected residents, ensuring that the perspectives of actors directly engaged in the conflict were represented (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Valentina et al., 2025). The third source comprised policy documents, such as official regulations, minutes of local parliamentary meetings, and public statements by government representatives. These were

analyzed to trace the crisis communication strategies employed by local authorities (Coombs, 2015; Rezeki et al., 2025).

Data analysis combined framing analysis and thematic analysis. Framing analysis followed Pan and Kosicki's (1993) model, focusing on syntactic, script, thematic, and rhetorical structures to reveal how the media constructed narratives of the Bangkonol conflict (Entman, 1993; Nugrahani et al., 2022). Interview transcripts were subjected to thematic coding to identify patterns of resistance, perceptions of risk, and communication experiences among residents (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Mulasari, 2024). In addition, government responses were assessed through the lens of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which emphasizes strategies such as denial, shifting the blame, or accommodation (Coombs, 2015; Hasanah & Destrity, 2024; Simanjuntak & Noer, 2024).

The validity of findings was ensured through triangulation of sources, comparing evidence across media reports, interviews, and policy documents (Denzin, 2017; Sulastri, 2024). Furthermore, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected informants to confirm their accuracy. Ethical standards were maintained throughout the research by securing informed consent from participants, ensuring voluntary involvement, and protecting the confidentiality of all informants (Bryman, 2016).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Media Framing of The Bangkonol Landfill Conflict

An analysis of 50 online and print news articles published between January 2024 and June 2025 reveals that the media played a central role in shaping public perceptions of the Bangkonol landfill conflict. Rather than merely reporting events, the media actively constructed narratives about who was responsible, what was at stake, and what solutions were considered appropriate. These constructions manifested in three dominant frames: the environmental frame, the social conflict frame, and the government failure frame.

The environmental frame appeared most prominently, with many reports highlighting the ecological risks posed by the landfill. News outlets emphasized overcapacity, foul odors, and the contamination of soil and groundwater. For instance, *Bantenraya.com* (2025) reported: "The Bangkonol landfill has exceeded its capacity, producing unbearable odors and potentially contaminating residents' water sources." Such coverage reinforced the perception that waste management is not merely a technical issue but a direct threat to public health and environmental sustainability. This aligns with Wilson et al. (2015), who noted that the media often amplify health risks to strengthen the urgency of environmental problems.

The social conflict frame was equally significant. Media outlets spotlighted residents' resistance as the core of the controversy. *Pandeglantnews* (2025) reported: "Residents strongly reject waste from outside the region because it will only increase the environmental burden they have already borne." Narratives emphasized the sense of injustice felt by the community, portraying the conflict as an unequal struggle in which local people carried ecological costs for regional interests. Social media further reinforced this frame through the hashtag #TolakSampahTangsel ("Reject South Tangerang's Waste"), which gained traction locally. As Lalitha and Hassan (2024) argue, digital platforms are instrumental in scaling up local grievances into broader political debates by mobilizing emotions and solidarity.

The government failure frame highlighted weak transparency and communication by local authorities. National outlets such as *Kompas* framed the controversy as a result of poor governance: "The regional waste management agreement was rushed without a clear environmental impact assessment, leading to growing public distrust" (*Kompas*, 2025). Through this frame, the government was depicted as neglectful, non-participatory, and inattentive to citizens' concerns. This finding is consistent with Sulkhan (2022), who notes that Indonesian media frequently construct narratives of government illegitimacy in environmental conflicts.

Taken together, these three frames reinforce one another. The environmental frame created awareness of ecological risks; the social conflict frame mobilized collective solidarity; and the government failure frame delegitimized local authorities. Within Entman's (1993) framing theory, this demonstrates how the media simultaneously define problems, diagnose causes, make moral evaluations, and suggest remedies. Thus, the media acted not as neutral observers but as political actors influencing the trajectory of the conflict.

This dynamic also resonates with agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which posits that media attention determines which issues gain public salience. By consistently framing the landfill as a crisis of environment, society, and governance, the media elevated the Bangkonol conflict to a regional agenda. Similar patterns were observed in transboundary haze disputes, where media framing amplified public pressure on governments (Rochyadi-Reetz et al., 2020). In this sense, the Bangkonol case demonstrates the media's dual role as both a site of discourse contestation and a driver of political legitimacy.

Community Resistance and Public Communication Dynamics

Interviews with 15 key informants, including residents, activists, and community leaders, reveal that resistance to the Bangkonol landfill expansion took multiple forms. Rather than being monolithic, this resistance unfolded through symbolic, participatory, and collaborative strategies. Each dimension reflected how citizens not only opposed the policy but also sought to reframe the discourse and assert their agency in shaping waste governance.

The first dimension is symbolic resistance, where residents expressed their opposition through public demonstrations, banners, and online campaigns. Large signs were displayed at village entrances reading "Reject South Tangerang's Waste in Bangkonol!" One resident explained: "We put up banners so that everyone knows we refuse to be the dumping ground for other regions." Symbolic resistance also migrated to digital platforms, as seen in the viral hashtag #TolakSampahTangsel, which amplified local grievances to wider audiences. This pattern echoes findings by Taufiq (2025), who observed how digital activism transforms environmental disputes into broader struggles for recognition.

The second dimension is participatory resistance, where citizens engaged with formal political institutions to challenge the landfill project. Activists organized petitions, attended local parliamentary hearings, and demanded the cancellation of inter-district cooperation agreements. One youth activist remarked: "We have gone to the DPRD several times to demand that this agreement be stopped. If it goes ahead, we will be the ones to suffer." This shows that resistance was not limited to street protests but extended to institutional engagement, demonstrating a sophisticated awareness of democratic channels. Such strategies align with the argument of Susjono and Sufyanto (2024), who emphasize that contentious politics in Indonesia often blend grassroots protest with formal political advocacy.

The third dimension is collaborative resistance, which involved proposing alternative solutions rather than mere rejection. Several community leaders advocated for strengthening household waste segregation, establishing local waste banks, and developing small-scale composting initiatives. A community elder noted: "If the government is serious, involve us. Many of us are ready to manage waste through community-based programs if we are given facilities and support." This reflects an important shift from protest to proposition, indicating that residents were willing to co-produce solutions if governance became more inclusive. Mulasari (2024) similarly highlights that community-driven waste management in Yogyakarta succeeded because local residents were treated as partners rather than obstacles.

Taken together, these forms of resistance illustrate the dynamic nature of public communication. Citizens did not remain passive recipients of policy but actively reshaped the discourse surrounding waste governance. Their actions mirror Habermas's (1989) concept of the public sphere, where citizens generate counter-discourses to challenge dominant narratives and hold authorities accountable. In this case, symbolic protests galvanized attention, participatory

actions leveraged institutional mechanisms, and collaborative initiatives demonstrated constructive alternatives.

These findings contribute to a broader understanding of how resistance in environmental governance is not merely reactive but also creative. By reframing the conflict as a question of justice, legitimacy, and participation, residents positioned themselves as co-authors of policy debates. This resonates with Valentina et al. (2025), who argue that sustainable waste governance in Indonesia depends on inclusive communication and citizen participation. Thus, the Bangkonol conflict exemplifies how grassroots resistance can simultaneously disrupt top-down policymaking and open pathways toward more democratic and dialogical forms of governance.

Government Response and Crisis Communication

The analysis of policy documents, parliamentary records, and public statements by local officials shows that the Pandeglang government adopted a largely defensive communication strategy in addressing the Bangkonol landfill conflict. Instead of engaging in open dialogue with residents, officials emphasized the necessity of regional cooperation while downplaying or deferring environmental concerns. This defensive stance shaped the conflict dynamics, fueling distrust and intensifying resistance.

The first and most prominent strategy observed was denial. Local officials repeatedly framed the landfill project as inevitable, while dismissing residents' concerns as exaggerated. One government representative stated during an interview: "This cooperation is a regional necessity. Without it, South Tangerang would face a waste crisis. The environmental problems can be managed later." Such statements not only minimized legitimate fears about ecological risks but also conveyed a lack of empathy toward affected communities. According to Coombs (2015), denial strategies often backfire in crises rooted in organizational negligence because they appear evasive and erode credibility.

The second strategy was shifting blame. Instead of acknowledging weaknesses in local planning, officials justified the project by citing national waste management targets and obligations to neighboring municipalities. For instance, a press release from the local government argued that "Pandeglang cannot stand alone; regional collaboration is mandated by broader policy frameworks." While this narrative attempted to diffuse responsibility, it inadvertently reinforced perceptions of the government as prioritizing external interests over the welfare of its own citizens. Hasanah and Destrity (2024) found similar dynamics in pandemic communication, where shifting blame increased public skepticism and reduced compliance.

Only a limited number of statements indicated accommodative responses, such as promises to expand the landfill site by 3.5 hectares or to upgrade infrastructure. Coverage in *Tangselife.com* (2025) reported: "The local government has promised to improve facilities and mitigate environmental impacts in response to public concerns." However, residents dismissed these promises as insufficient. An activist commented: "These are just political words. In reality, the community was never consulted during the decision-making process." This highlights a critical gap between symbolic accommodation and substantive engagement, further undermining trust.

The government's reliance on denial and blame-shifting reflects a limited understanding of crisis communication principles. According to the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), crises stemming from preventable causes—such as poor policy planning or lack of consultation—require accommodative strategies, including apologies, corrective actions, and genuine dialogue (Coombs, 2015). By contrast, defensive strategies aggravate perceptions of irresponsibility and illegitimacy. Evidence from the Pertamina Hulu Energi case (Simanjuntak & Noer, 2024) shows similar outcomes, where denial worsened reputational damage and prolonged crisis recovery.

In the Bangkonol conflict, the government's communication approach not only failed to de-escalate tensions but also amplified the media's negative framing and legitimized residents' resistance. Rezeki et al. (2025) argue that local governments in Indonesia often lack institutional capacity for transparent and dialogical communication, which explains why crisis responses default to defensive modes. Consequently, the Pandeglang case illustrates how inadequate crisis communication can transform a technical waste management issue into a political legitimacy crisis.

Discussion

The findings from the Bangkonol landfill conflict highlight how communication processes—spanning media narratives, grassroots resistance, and government responses—intersect to transform what initially appeared as a technical waste management issue into a broader legitimacy crisis. Understanding this dynamic requires situating the results within several theoretical frameworks, including agenda-setting, framing, the public sphere, and crisis communication theory.

The case strongly supports the insights of agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Through sustained coverage, local and national media elevated Bangkonol from a local dispute into a pressing regional concern. By repeatedly featuring the issue, the media made it impossible for policymakers to ignore. This process mirrors what Roehyanti-Reetz et al. (2020) found in the transboundary haze dispute, where continuous coverage amplified public attention and compelled governments to act. In both cases, the media served not only as messengers but as powerful agenda drivers.

The role of framing further explains how the public interpreted the conflict. Following Entman (1993) and Pan and Kosicki (1993), framing involves defining problems, assigning causes, making moral evaluations, and suggesting solutions. In Bangkonol, environmental frames underscored ecological risks, social conflict frames mobilized solidarity among residents, and governance frames questioned the competence of local authorities. These overlapping frames created a layered narrative that reinforced resistance and eroded legitimacy. Comparable dynamics have been observed in renewable energy debates, where competing frames influence whether citizens see projects as opportunities or threats (Lalitha & Hassan, 2024).

The dynamics of framing connect directly to the emergence of a public sphere. Habermas (1989) describes the public sphere as a space where citizens generate counter-discourses to challenge dominant narratives. In Bangkonol, residents broadened the conversation beyond simple rejection of government policy. Symbolic protests drew attention, participatory engagement leveraged democratic institutions, and collaborative proposals signaled readiness to co-create solutions. Digital platforms extended this sphere, with hashtags such as #TolakSampahTangsel amplifying local voices. Studies by Valentina et al. (2025) and Mulasari (2024) confirm that inclusive, community-driven communication is vital for sustainable waste governance in Indonesia.

The government's communication reveals significant limitations when seen through the lens of crisis communication theory. The local authority relied heavily on denial and blame-shifting, despite the fact that preventable crises—such as weak planning or insufficient consultation—require accommodative strategies like transparency, apologies, and corrective measures (Coombs, 2015). Defensive communication deepened distrust and mirrored the Pertamina Hulu Energi case, where denial worsened reputational damage (Simanjuntak & Noer, 2024). Rezeki et al. (2025) similarly note that weak dialogical capacity in many Indonesian local governments makes crises of legitimacy more likely.

The convergence of these perspectives underscores that environmental conflicts in Indonesia extend beyond infrastructure or technical management. Media shape salience and meaning, citizens create counter-publics that expand democratic participation, and government responses expose institutional capacities for maintaining legitimacy. The Bangkonol conflict exemplifies

Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) argument that reality is co-produced by media, audiences, and institutions, each shaping the trajectory of public issues in interconnected ways.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that the Bangkonol landfill conflict is best understood not as a technical issue of waste management but as a communicative process involving media, citizens, and government. Media framing elevated the conflict by stressing environmental risks, social injustice, and governance failures. Citizens responded through symbolic protests, participatory engagement, and collaborative proposals, reflecting the vitality of a public sphere that extended into both offline and digital arenas. Government authorities, by contrast, relied on defensive communication strategies that deepened distrust and turned a policy dispute into a crisis of legitimacy.

This conclusion enriches academic debates in communication studies by integrating insights from agenda-setting, framing, the public sphere, and crisis communication theory into a single empirical case. The findings clarify how media construct layered narratives that shape public opinion and political legitimacy, how citizens in developing contexts leverage the public sphere to contest exclusionary policies, and how inadequate government responses aggravate conflict rather than resolve it. The Bangkonol case therefore offers a valuable contribution to scholarship on environmental governance and public communication.

The implications extend beyond theory into practice. Local governments need stronger institutional capacity to apply transparent, dialogical, and participatory communication strategies. Early consultation, credible risk communication, and genuine inclusion of residents in decision-making are essential steps for preventing escalation. Media organizations also play a critical role in fostering deliberation by balancing the dramatization of conflict with constructive reporting. Civil society groups can build on community mobilization to form partnerships with authorities, ensuring that citizen-led solutions such as waste banks and household segregation gain institutional recognition.

The overall significance of this case lies in its dual message. Neglecting communication transforms technical policies into political crises, while inclusive communication opens pathways from resistance toward collaboration. Strengthening communicative practices across media, communities, and governments is crucial not only for improving waste governance in Pandeglang but also for advancing environmental policy in Indonesia more broadly.

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