



Leadership in times of crisis: Local government responses to fuel shortages in Bengkulu Province

Muhammad Adnan Al Kadly Kanedy^{1,*}

¹ Department Public Administration, Faculty Administrative Sciences, Universitas Indonesia, Depok, West Java, 16424, Indonesia

* Correspondence: muhammad.adnan18@ui.ac.id

Received Date: January 30, 2025

Revised Date: February 23, 2025

Accepted Date: February 28, 2025

ABSTRACT

Background: This study investigates the leadership response of the Bengkulu Provincial Government to the 2025 fuel shortage crisis, using the theoretical framework of crisis management and adaptive leadership. The crisis revealed structural weaknesses in Indonesia's centralized fuel governance system, as well as the limited anticipatory capacity at the local level. **Methods:** The research applies a qualitative method with document analysis, drawing on policy documents, media reports, and statistical data. The analysis is guided by Boin et al.'s five tasks of crisis leadership: sense-making, decision-making, meaning-making, terminating, and learning. **Findings:** Findings indicate that the local government's response was predominantly reactive and characterized by ad hoc decisions, limited coordination, and weak narrative framing. While symbolic actions such as the work-from-home policy helped to mitigate immediate public dissatisfaction, deeper issues such as logistical vulnerabilities at Pulau Baai Port and the absence of contingency reserves remained unaddressed. Furthermore, the lack of transparent communication platforms hindered public trust and accountability. The crisis termination was premature and unaccompanied by institutional learning or structural reforms, reflecting a failure to transition from short-term crisis response to long-term resilience planning. **Conclusion:** This study concludes that the Bengkulu case highlights the urgent need for decentralized energy governance, investment in predictive infrastructure, and the institutionalization of crisis learning mechanisms. Local governments must be empowered not only to manage operational disruptions but also to initiate reforms that reduce systemic vulnerability and improve crisis preparedness in peripheral regions. **Novelty/Originality of this Article:** This study uniquely applies the five tasks of crisis leadership to analyze a provincial government's response to a fuel crisis, revealing critical gaps in decentralized governance and institutional learning often overlooked in Indonesian energy policy research.

KEYWORDS: crisis leadership; fuel shortage; institutional learning; local government.

1. Introduction

The shortage of fuel reflects a growing imbalance between increasing societal demand and the finite availability of natural resources. Classical economics identifies this as a fundamental issue of allocation, wherein unlimited human wants must be met with limited resources (Samuelson & Nordhaus, 2010). However, shortage is not solely attributable to physical limitations; it can also result from unequal distribution and institutional inefficiencies. Inequitable allocation often signals governance failures, as public choice theory suggests that distribution decisions are frequently shaped by vested interests (Comfort, 2007). The fuel shortage in Bengkulu Province exemplifies not only supply

Cite This Article:

Kanedy, M. A. A. K. (2025). Leadership in times of crisis: Local government responses to fuel shortages in Bengkulu Province. *Green Governance: Exploring Politics, Social Justice, and the Environment*, 2(1), 61-74. <https://doi.org/10.61511/gg.v2i1.2025.2027>

Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. This article is distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



constraints but also the need for more equitable and responsive distribution systems and energy governance.

Effective energy management is essential for balancing economic growth, social justice, and environmental sustainability (Elisha, 2021). Energy governance frameworks emphasize the importance of resilience—the capacity of the energy system to ensure reliable, affordable, and sustainable energy amidst disruptions (Cherp & Jewell, 2014). Moreover, heavy reliance on external fuel supplies increases vulnerability, as organizations dependent on uncontrollable external resources face higher risks (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2009). Such dependence can lead to significant social and economic instability during supply disruptions. This situation also highlights the failure of public service delivery, as inadequate access to essential services like energy can erode public trust and satisfaction (Bovaird & Löffler, 2024).

In a decentralized governance context like Indonesia, energy security issues are further complicated by the division of authority between central and local governments (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). While local governments bear the brunt of public discontent during fuel shortages, they often lack the mandate to control supply chains regulated at the national level. This misalignment reflects a structural contradiction in Indonesia's post-decentralization landscape, where autonomy in service delivery is not always matched by adequate fiscal or regulatory control (Harahap & Ishak, 2016). The Bengkulu experience thus reveals a governance gap: the centralization of fuel policy conflicts with local expectations of government responsiveness, undermining the legitimacy of local leadership during crisis events.

From a leadership perspective, fuel shortages test more than just logistical capacity—they challenge the political and symbolic functions of local leadership. Theoretical perspectives on crisis governance, including complex adaptive systems, suggest that leaders must move beyond linear decision-making to embrace flexible, multi-actor coordination in response to non-routine disruptions. However, in Bengkulu, the absence of coordinated response protocols, stakeholder engagement, and anticipatory planning suggests a largely reactive model of crisis management. This limits the efficiency and legitimacy of government responses, particularly in peripheral provinces that are more vulnerable to distribution delays.

In addition, the Bengkulu crisis reflects deeper territorial inequalities in Indonesia's development agenda. Urban centers with economic and political clout often receive priority energy access, leaving provinces like Bengkulu more vulnerable to supply chain volatility. This pattern reinforces spatial inequities in public service delivery and exacerbates public frustration in already marginalized areas. Without strategic leadership that addresses these long-term inequalities, short-term crisis responses risk becoming cyclical and unsustainable.

Equally important is the performative dimension of leadership during crisis events. As Boin et al. (2005) argue, leaders are not just problem solvers—they are also narrative builders. Their ability to communicate clearly, frame the crisis meaningfully, and maintain public morale significantly shapes the trajectory of crisis management. In Bengkulu, weak narrative coherence, delayed public briefings, and inconsistent messaging deepened public uncertainty and discontent. These shortcomings illustrate the consequences of leadership failing to fulfill its symbolic and communicative roles during emergencies.

Table 1. Number of motor vehicles

Regency/City	Passenger cars	Buses	Trucks	Motorbikes	Total
South Bengkulu	31,405	195	8,022	281,051	320,673
Rejang Lebong	9,664	27	4,697	75,920	90,308
North Bengkulu	11,004	36	8,045	137,361	156,446
Kaur	3,024	12	1,832	36,970	41,838
Seluma	5,788	6	4,408	74,320	84,522
Mukomuko	8,676	87	5,629	101,201	115,593
Lebong	2,196	4	1,467	29,204	32,871
Kepahiang	4,752	15	2,625	46,820	54,212

Central Bengkulu	4,086	16	2,965	45,442	52,489
Bengkulu City	49,312	565	17,195	245,273	312,345
Bengkulu	129,907	963	56,885	1,073,542	1,261,297

(Central Statistics Agency of Bengkulu Province, 2025)

In recent months (Table 1), Bengkulu Province has experienced persistent fuel shortages, triggering widespread social unrest. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the province recorded 1,261,297 motorized vehicles in 2025, including passenger cars, buses, trucks, and motorcycles (BPS, 2025). This figure excludes unrecorded vehicles transiting through the province, indicating a substantial and growing demand for fuel. Consequently, any disruption in fuel supply significantly affects mobility, economic activity, and public services (Syarif et al., 2024). The government's failure to respond effectively has led to public dissatisfaction, with many perceiving the crisis as a breakdown in the government's fundamental duty to provide essential services.

Addressing this issue requires an understanding of energy security and systemic vulnerabilities, as well as a critical evaluation of the local government's crisis response. Drawing on crisis leadership theory, effective public leadership in times of crisis involves five key tasks: sense-making, decision-making, meaning-making, terminating, and learning (Boin et al., 2005). In this context, sense-making refers to the government's capacity to swiftly comprehend the evolving dynamics of the fuel crisis; decision-making involves timely and strategic actions; and meaning-making underscores the need to communicate a coherent narrative that sustains public trust. The tasks of terminating and learning highlight the importance of resolving the crisis and institutionalizing lessons to prevent future occurrences.

Bengkulu Provincial Government's response can thus be assessed through the lens of crisis leadership. Failures in communicating the root causes, delayed operational decisions, and the absence of post-crisis evaluations reveal weaknesses in leadership that should be adaptive, timely, and communicative. This research aims to assess the extent to which the local government's crisis response addressed the population's urgent energy needs while mitigating broader socio-economic disruptions.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach using document analysis to explore the leadership responses of the Bengkulu Provincial Government during the 2025 fuel shortage crisis. The qualitative approach was selected for its ability to capture complex socio-political processes, institutional dynamics, and leadership behavior that may not be quantifiable but are crucial for understanding crisis governance (Creswell, 2024).

Data were collected from a wide range of secondary sources, including official government documents, ministerial decrees, provincial regulations, press releases, media coverage from both national and regional outlets (e.g., CNN Indonesia, Kompas), and reports issued by state-owned enterprises such as Pertamina. These sources were selected for their relevance to the crisis timeline, their representation of various stakeholder perspectives, and their potential to reveal both public narratives and institutional responses.

The data analysis utilized thematic analysis to identify patterns, categories, and emerging themes related to the causes of the crisis, leadership strategies, accountability framing, and learning outcomes. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework guided the thematic coding process: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. The themes were interpreted through the analytical lens provided by the crisis management framework developed by Boin et al. (2005), which includes key dimensions such as sense-making, decision-making, meaning-making, crisis termination, and institutional learning.

To enhance the validity of the findings, the research employed triangulation by cross-checking narratives across various types of sources, including policy documents, media statements, and stakeholder commentaries. Particular attention was paid to the rhetorical

framing of responsibility, agency, and legitimacy, using Bovens et al.'s (1999) typology of accountability tactics. This allowed the study to assess not only what actions were taken but also how leaders presented, justified, or deflected those actions in public discourse.

Furthermore, crisis leadership analysis was conducted by mapping leadership actions onto adaptive leadership and symbolic governance theories, enabling a more nuanced understanding of both operational decisions and political performances. For example, the Governor's public messaging, the deployment of fuel tankers, and the introduction of the Work From Home policy were examined not only as technical measures but also as symbolic acts intended to manage public perception.

Although the study did not involve fieldwork or interviews due to the time-bound and retrospective nature of the crisis, inductive inference was used to reconstruct decision-making sequences and sense-making processes from the textual data. This allowed for the reconstruction of crisis escalation and response timelines, identification of coordination gaps, and evaluation of the learning—or lack thereof—that followed the crisis.

Lastly, the study consciously excluded normative evaluations and instead focused on analyzing governing behavior, institutional limitations, and leadership patterns within the actual constraints faced by local authorities. This methodological stance reflects the critical-interpretive orientation of the study, which privileges meaning-making, institutional context, and embedded agency over hypothetical best practices.

3. Results and Discussion

In May 2025, Bengkulu Province experienced a severe fuel shortage that affected all districts and municipalities. This crisis was not merely temporary but revealed structural deficiencies in the energy distribution system and highlighted the limited capacity of the provincial government to manage disruptions in a strategic sector. A series of chronological reports provide insights into the causes, impacts, and measures undertaken by the local government and other stakeholders in response to the crisis.

3.1 Factors causing fuel crisis in Bengkulu

Initial findings indicate that the fuel crisis in Bengkulu Province was driven by a combination of technical disruptions and systemic weaknesses in energy distribution governance. A primary cause was the shallowing of the shipping channel at Pulau Baai Port, which hindered Pertamina tankers from docking and distributing fuel across the province (CNN Indonesia, 2025a; Rahayu & Gandhi, 2025; Ramalan & Djumena, 2025). As the province's main fuel entry point, the port's condition represents a critical vulnerability that should have been anticipated. PT Pertamina Patra Niaga further reported that distribution was disrupted by delays in fuel shipments, which impeded supply to Pertamina depots and resulted in widespread shortages at fuel stations (Suci, 2024). Pertamina attributed these disruptions to uncontrollable natural and technical factors. Meanwhile, the provincial government argued that the fuel quota allocated by Pertamina's central office was insufficient to meet the rising demand driven by increased economic activity and mobility (Supandi, 2025). This reflects a lack of alignment between national fuel allocation policies and actual energy consumption patterns in Bengkulu Province.

3.2 Socio-economic impacts of fuel crisis to the community

The impact of the fuel shortage was acutely felt by the public. Long queues at gas stations became a daily occurrence during the crisis, with reports of lines extending up to two kilometers and drivers beginning to queue before dawn (Oktavia, 2025). This reflects widespread public anxiety and a high dependence on fuel for daily mobility and economic activities. The shortage also led to price surges at the retail level. CNN Indonesia (2025a) reported that fuel prices in several areas of Bengkulu Province reached IDR 30,000 per liter—far exceeding the government's highest retail price (HET). This not only imposed a

heavy burden on lower-income groups but also heightened the risk of social unrest and potential horizontal conflict among fuel consumers. In the productive sectors, the crisis severely affected fishermen, farmers, and small businesses, whose operations rely heavily on fuel. Disruptions to fishing and the distribution of agricultural products threatened rural livelihoods and posed broader risks to local food security (Hood, 2002).

3.3 Local government' responses: leadership during the crisis

In the political realm of crisis investigation, actors employ a variety of rhetorical tactics and arguments, the success of which can vary depending on when they are used (timing), where they are used (forum), who uses them (credibility), and how they are delivered (structuring and delivery). These tactics are also not mutually exclusive, meaning they are often used simultaneously in different forums to address different accountability questions. Furthermore, these tactics can be used sequentially, for example, when the emphasis in the blame game gradually shifts from agency to responsibility, or when a particular tactic has previously proven ineffective. Table 3.1 based on Bovens et al. (1999) illustrates the arguments for how alternative tactics are often used by actors to see how responses to crises become crucial for more in-depth analysis.

Table 2. Alternative Tactics related to the accountability and argument

Accountability Dimension	Tactic	Argument
Severity	Denial	Nothing bad happened
	Mitigation	Harm was negligible
		Harm was compensated
		You cannot make an omelet...
Agency	Positive spin	It was a success
	Combating causation	It was not my doing
		I was only a small contributor
		Uncontrollable forces reigned
	Combating capacity	I was not informed
		Others made vital decisions
Responsibility	Blaming messenger	I was under orders
		Publicity caused the harm
		Investigation was unfair
	Disqualifying investigators	Investigators are incompetent
		Report is unprofessional
	Justification	I chose the lesser evil
		I prevented worse by others
	Preventing labeling	This was atypical behavior
	Scapegoating	I have punished the culprit(s)
	Repentance	I apologize, please forgive me
	Symbolic reform	I have learned my lesson
		I have changed policies

(Boin et.al., 2005)

There are five major characteristics that can be used in analyzing the crisis: sense-making, decision-making, meaning-making, terminating, dan learning (Boin et al., 2005)

3.3.1 Sense-making

The fuel shortage crisis in Bengkulu Province illustrates the complexity of modern crises, demanding rapid sense-making by local governments. Sense-making refers to how leaders interpret evolving crises in real time (Boin et al., 2005). In this case, Bengkulu Provincial Government responded with various measures that were largely reactive, ad hoc, and lacked a structured crisis management plan. As Boin et al. (2005) note, most public organizations are oriented toward goal achievement rather than crisis prevention, which often impedes early detection. This was evident in the absence of a fuel reserve or

contingency plan, despite foreseeable increases in demand driven by economic growth and mobility (Rosenthal et al., 2001). Following the onset of the crisis, the Governor of Bengkulu requested additional fuel allocations from the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, citing rising public consumption (Supandi, 2025). This represents a problemistic search—responding only after a crisis emerges—highlighting weak anticipatory capacity (Boin et al., 2005). Pertamina promptly addressed the issue by dispatching 64 tanker trucks to restock empty gas stations (Muliawati, 2025; Oktavia, 2025). While this reflects effective coordination, it also reveals a heavy vertical reliance on central and corporate actors, underscoring limited regional autonomy in energy management.

The lack of buffer stocks and distribution infrastructure—such as the still-developing Pulau Baai Port—indicates that crisis risks have been normalized as tolerable (Boin et al., 2005). Reliance on the assumption of continuous supply masks systemic risks, exemplifying the "normalization of deviance" (Vaughan, 1996). While the Governor of Bengkulu and officials have actively reassured the public, fulfilling a symbolic sense-making function to build trust (Boin et al., 2005), the absence of a data-driven communication platform—such as a fuel distribution dashboard—limits transparency and citizen engagement.

The Bengkulu City Government's Work From Home policy for civil servants to reduce fuel use (Mayasari & Musriadi, 2025) reflects a strategic, adaptive initiative, highlighting local government potential for policy experimentation. However, this remains ad hoc and outside a broader, integrated crisis management framework.

Boin et al. (2005) note that crises often reveal institutional information disjunctions. In Bengkulu, the lack of coordination among local government, police, and Pertamina—evidenced by the absence of a joint command or integrated data center—resulted in delayed and inadequate responses. Fuel shortages, a foreseeable scenario, were not anticipated with SOPs or simulation exercises. Resilient organizations, Boin et al. (2005) argue, rely on embedded crisis simulations to expedite decisions.

Though local leaders appeared responsive, they lacked transformational leadership to foster collective sense-making or structural reforms such as logistics improvements or energy diversification. Leadership remained focused on short-term relief rather than building long-term systemic resilience. The sense-making perspective emphasizes the need for leaders to collectively interpret, understand, and communicate crises.

3.3.2 Decision making

Crises compel leaders to make high-stakes decisions under intense pressure, limited time, and often incomplete information (Boin et al., 2005). The Governor of Bengkulu, Helmi Hasan, responded swiftly by sending a formal request to the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources and Pertamina for additional fuel quotas—an immediate reaction to escalating public pressure (Supandi, 2025). He also cited increased post-pandemic mobility and economic activity as drivers of fuel demand. However, this response lacked a parallel assessment of distribution systems or buffer stock availability, making it a short-term fix that fails to address underlying structural issues.

Effective crisis response requires coordination (Boin et al., 2005). While the local government successfully prompted Pertamina to dispatch 64 tanker trucks, no evidence suggests the use of a technology-driven coordination tool such as a transparency dashboard. This absence has contributed to information gaps between the government, service providers, and the public. Field-level monitoring was conducted with the police and Satpol PP to prevent hoarding and panic buying (CNN Indonesia, 2025b), yet its effectiveness remains unverifiable and unbacked by formal cross-sector coordination protocols.

A key component of crisis decision-making is "non-decision making"—critical actions that are neglected or avoided (Boin et al., 2005). In this case, the lack of a contingency plan for fuel distribution or reserves exemplifies such inaction. No technical solutions were proposed to address the shallowing of the Pulau Baai Port, the primary cause of depot delays—an issue that should have been anticipated through risk management and logistical planning.

Furthermore, the Bengkulu government's reliance on central authorities and Pertamina reflects limited local authority over fuel logistics and quota management. This centralization constrains local initiative and delays response, aligning with Boin et al. (2005) critique that overly centralized crisis management can hinder timely action. The inability to distribute fuel without central intervention underscores the province's failure to develop autonomous and adaptive crisis response capacity.

The Work From Home (WFH) policy implemented by the Bengkulu City Government exemplifies symbolic leadership, aimed at reducing mobility during the fuel crisis. Though temporary, this initiative demonstrates that crisis responses need not be top-down; they can emerge from local reflections that are more attuned to the crisis's immediate impacts. However, as emphasized in crisis decision-making literature, symbolic policies like WFH must be supported by information systems, data-driven risk communication, and public participation. In Bengkulu, no real-time digital platform for fuel distribution transparency was available, limiting the policy's effectiveness.

A key function of crisis leadership, according to Boin et al. (20), is meaning making—shaping public narratives and understanding of the crisis. While the Governor of Bengkulu actively issued calming media statements, these were not reinforced by transparent data or participatory communication strategies. In a crisis that directly affects daily life, such as a fuel shortage, public trust depends on two-way communication and accountable distribution monitoring.

The decision-making process in Bengkulu reflects common crisis traits: reactive, fragmented, and lacking structural coordination (Boin et al., 2005). Although the governor undertook various actions, the absence of contingency planning illustrates a pattern of non-decision making—where essential choices are delayed or avoided—thus exacerbating the crisis. This lack of forward planning is compounded by the absence of meaningful leadership in shaping public understanding and fostering systemic solutions.

3.3.3 Meaning-making

In any crisis, governments must not only respond operationally but also manage public perception through effective communication. This aligns with the concept of meaning-making, which refers to the process by which political actors construct narratives to shape collective understanding of the crisis—its causes, responsible parties, and possible resolutions (Boin et al., 2005). A key element in this process is framing, or defining the crisis through a particular narrative intelligible to the public.

The Governor of Bengkulu framed the fuel shortage as a consequence of rising consumption driven by post-pandemic economic growth and increased public activity (Supandi, 2025). This narrative presents the crisis not as a failure of local energy governance or distribution systems, but as a natural outcome of regional development. Such a framing creates an “exogenous” narrative, shifting responsibility away from the local government and toward the central government as the quota provider.

Within the meaning-making framework, this strategy functions as a form of depoliticization—portraying the crisis as the result of systemic pressures rather than policy or managerial shortcomings (Boin et al., 2005). By attributing the shortage to “increased demand” rather than distribution failures, the government seeks to diffuse blame and position the situation as “no one’s fault”, thereby reducing political accountability.

Bengkulu Provincial Government responded to the crisis not only through verbal explanations but also through symbolic actions, which function as part of a broader crisis ritual. One such example is the implementation of a work-from-home (WFH) policy for civil servants by the Bengkulu City Government. This policy serves as a symbolic gesture of seriousness and solidarity, reflecting leadership empathy and an attempt to reduce psychological stress while bolstering government legitimacy (Boin et al., 2005). The WFH measure is framed not solely as a functional response but also as a communicative act—a demonstration of governmental “sacrifice” aimed at curbing fuel consumption. This

narrative emphasizes that crisis resolution requires not only intervention from the central government or Pertamina but also collective action from the public and the bureaucracy.

However, a key shortcoming in the provincial government's response is the absence of a transparent, data-driven communication platform, such as a fuel distribution dashboard. This lack of verifiable information undermines public trust and reflects a limited capacity for effective meaning-making. In crisis contexts, inadequate information can fuel speculation and distrust (Boin et al., 2005). Although the Governor and other officials engaged with the media, the failure to disclose real-time data left room for "masking"—a condition in symbolic crisis management where the obscuration of reality, intentional or not, may lead to public misperception and manipulation.

The media played a crucial role in shaping the crisis narrative alongside the government and the public, constructing a "visual dramaturgy" that heightened the sense of urgency. This placed pressure on the government to respond not only with arguments but also with symbolic and visual gestures. Measures such as the deployment of fuel tanks by Pertamina were perceived as reactive rather than part of a sustainable, long-term solution. In a crisis heavily mediated by visual representations, the government's failure to provide a corresponding visual response risked forfeiting a significant symbolic platform (Boin et al., 2005).

The effectiveness of crisis communication is closely tied to the strength of inter-agency coordination. In the Bengkulu fuel shortage case, there was no clear narrative indicating integration between the provincial government, municipal and district authorities, and central agencies such as the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources or Pertamina. This lack of coordination weakened the government's credibility as a reliable source of information (Boin et al., 2005). Moreover, the absence of a designated spokesperson or centralized crisis communication center led to fragmented messaging from multiple actors, undermining narrative coherence. Without a primary reference point, public confusion increased, and message discipline essential for effective meaning-making during crises was compromised.

A critical aspect of meaning-making is the ability to reframe crises as opportunities for structural reform. Unfortunately, the Bengkulu government failed to use the fuel shortage as a policy window to address deeper issues such as fossil fuel dependency, the development of alternative energy sources, or improvements to Port Baai Island's distribution system. The lack of a discourse coalition around long-term solutions suggests the crisis was treated merely as a temporary disruption. In contrast, effective crisis leadership involves not only managing the present but articulating a credible and compelling vision of the future (Boin et al., 2005).

The government's failure to present a roadmap or contingency plan for future disruptions reinforces the perception of a reactive, short-term approach—a "firefighting" stance rather than proactive governance. This perception is worsened by the absence of updates regarding fuel storage or buffer stock systems. If a medium-term strategy had been developed and communicated, the crisis could have served as a catalyst for energy and logistics reform, transforming public anxiety into support for long-overdue policy changes.

This analysis shows that the meaning-making process in the fuel crisis in Bengkulu Province still faces major challenges in terms of framing, policy symbolization, communication coordination, and the creation of future narratives. The Bengkulu Provincial Government has been quite successful in building a narrative of the causes of the crisis exogenously and displaying solidarity through the WFH policy. However, limitations in data transparency, the absence of long-term plans, and coordination between actors have caused the meaning of the crisis to be shaped more by the media than by the government. As explained by Hart & Tummers (2019), a crisis is a symbolic contestation over the socio-political meaning of an event. A government that is able to dominate the narrative and build credibility will gain a permissive consensus that is important for the stability and effectiveness of policies. Unfortunately, in this context, the Bengkulu Provincial Government still shows a reactive rather than proactive dominance in crisis communication, thus losing momentum to make the crisis a catalyst for energy and logistics policy reform.

3.3.4 Termination

The notion that a crisis ends once the immediate threat is resolved is often misleading. Crisis management literature, particularly Boin et al. (2005), emphasizes that crisis termination involves not only operational resolution but also political, social, and symbolic closure. The fuel shortage in Bengkulu illustrates this complexity: despite logistical and communication efforts, the crisis persists in the form of public uncertainty, diminished trust in the energy distribution system, and the absence of long-term preventive strategies.

This case does not reflect a fast-burning crisis—such as a natural disaster with a clear endpoint following relief efforts—but rather a long-shadow crisis, where the initial disruption is managed, yet socio-political ramifications, public dissatisfaction, and systemic vulnerabilities endure (Boin et al., 2005). While Pertamina's deployment of 64 additional tankers (Ramalan & Djumena, 2025; Suci, 2024) and the City Government's WFH policy for civil servants (Mayasari & Musriadi, 2025) signal an immediate response, the lack of contingency planning and fuel buffer stock (Supandi, 2025) indicates an ad hoc rather than systemic approach. Without structural reforms and a long-term strategy, this crisis risks generating further political pressure, especially if the public perceives government action as reactive and insufficient for future resilience.

According to Boin et al. (2005), a crisis is not fully resolved until issues of accountability are addressed. In the case of the Bengkulu fuel shortage, the provincial government's response has remained confined to operational measures, with no visible evaluative mechanisms or acknowledgment of potential weaknesses in regional energy management. This creates a high risk of a "crisis after the crisis," especially as public and media scrutiny shifts from technical failures to political responsibility. Questions such as "Why was there no buffer stock?" or "Why did distribution fail?" can rapidly transform the discourse, placing leadership legitimacy under public evaluation.

Accountability in this context is not merely about administrative reporting but constitutes a critical element of democratic crisis resolution. The absence of a formal accountability narrative opens the door to blame shifting, where local governments may deflect responsibility onto the central government or Pertamina, and vice versa. This pattern reflects broader dynamics of blame deflection common in decentralized governance structures, where responsibility is ambiguously distributed.

Although the Governor of Bengkulu exhibited symbolic leadership through periodic media statements to calm public anxiety (CNN Indonesia, 2025b), the lack of a transparent, data-driven communication platform—such as a public dashboard on fuel distribution—diminished the credibility and impact of these efforts. As Boin et al. (2005) argue, a crisis must be resolved not only operationally but also symbolically, meaning the public must perceive that the crisis has been handled fairly, transparently, and comprehensively. Absent this, official narratives risk being seen as unilateral assertions that ignore public concerns, potentially triggering a secondary political crisis and prolonged investigation due to inadequate communication and accountability.

The risk of premature closure—declaring a crisis resolved too soon—is evident in the Bengkulu fuel shortage. The government's reliance on fuel redistribution and public appeals as sufficient measures to end the crisis overlooks the unresolved structural issues, particularly the inefficiencies in energy logistics at key ports such as Pulau Baai. Without reform in this area, similar disruptions are likely to recur, potentially with more severe consequences due to eroding public trust (Boin et al., 2005).

Effective crisis termination requires leadership capable of accurately gauging both the timing and public expectations—not only to declare an end to the emergency, but also to initiate reflection and institutional learning. Declaring the crisis over without addressing its systemic roots risks undermining the post-crisis legitimacy of the government. In Bengkulu, the exclusion of civil society, local NGOs, and independent auditors from the evaluation process reflects a weak commitment to inclusive accountability. There is no indication of willingness to facilitate public investigations or audits into regional energy policy. This lack

of transparency threatens to deplete the government's trust capital, which is essential for future crisis management (Hall, 1993).

The government's response reveals a leadership that is sensitive to public pressure but constrained institutionally. While operational responses were swift, the government has yet to demonstrate the capacity to achieve political and symbolic closure. Without a transparent, participatory accountability process and a comprehensive evaluation of regional energy governance, the crisis remains unresolved—both as a technical problem and as a symbolic challenge to the government's legitimacy. To truly end the crisis, the government must establish inclusive mechanisms for public oversight and develop energy policies that are not only reactive but also preventive and resilient.

3.3.5 Learning

In crisis management literature, crises are often conceptualized as "focusing events" that can catalyze institutional learning, policy reform, and structural change (Birkland, 1997); Boin et al. (2005). Crisis-induced learning involves diagnosing root causes, assessing the effectiveness of responses, and formulating long-term preventive strategies. However, Bengkulu Provincial Government's response to the 2025 fuel shortage reflects a limited and reactive form of learning that failed to address the structural underpinnings of the crisis. This suggests that the expected post-crisis learning—both single-loop (adjusting actions) and double-loop (revisiting underlying assumptions and policies)—has not yet been systematically pursued.

Boin et al. (2005) identify three types of learning that can emerge from crises. The first is experiential learning, which arises from direct involvement in crisis management and depends heavily on institutional memory. The second is explanation-based learning, which results from a systematic investigation and analysis of the root causes of a crisis. The third is competence-based learning, which focuses on acquiring new skills or resources to improve responses to similar crises in the future.

In Bengkulu context, the three dimensions of crisis-induced learning—investigation, innovation, and institutionalization—were not optimally mobilized. No independent investigative reports were released, no structural reforms were initiated to build fuel reserves, and no measures were taken to enhance bureaucratic capacity for future energy crises. The provincial government's initial response—submitting a request for additional fuel quotas to the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources and seeking distribution assistance from Pertamina (Supandi, 2025), reflects a reactive stance reliant on vertical intervention rather than proactive, contingency-based initiatives.

Although the Bengkulu City Government's implementation of a work-from-home policy could be viewed as a short-term innovation (Watra & Musriadi, 2025), it was not supported by long-term strategies such as energy diversification or the development of resilient logistics infrastructure. This aligns with Boin et al. (2005) critical observation that public organizations often "over-learn" from the most recent crisis, addressing symptoms without building resilience for different future scenarios.

In this case, single-loop learning—corrective action within existing frameworks—was evident in efforts to restore fuel distribution without reevaluating the underlying management structure. However, double-loop learning, which requires a reassessment of institutional norms, assumptions, and designs (Argyris & Schön, 1997), was absent. There was no initiative to evaluate systemic vulnerabilities, such as the logistics flow from Pulau Baai Port, despite its role as a core bottleneck. Instead of developing a buffer stock system or transparent, data-driven distribution mechanisms, the government prioritized short-term stability through public appeals and security coordination (CNN Indonesia, 2025b). Learning limitations are also attributed to several factors. One significant factor is limited organizational capacity, as described by the threat-rigidity hypothesis, which suggests that bureaucracies tend to revert to established routines when confronted with threats (Staw et al., 1981). Another factor is accountability politics, where post-crisis actions are often aimed more at avoiding blame than at initiating meaningful reforms (Boin et al., 2005).

Additionally, insufficient decentralized authority hampers local governments' ability to exercise flexibility in implementing energy distribution reforms or developing regional contingency reserves, further constraining opportunities for institutional learning.

In the case of Bengkulu, there appears to be an absence of an established emergency response structure. There is no indication of an active Task Force or Emergency Operations Center operating in the region. A crisis such as a fuel shortage necessitates a well-defined and pre-planned coordination mechanism involving multiple sectors.

A notable manifestation of perverse organizational learning occurs when institutions perceive their crisis response as successful and subsequently normalize ad hoc measures as standard operating procedures (Sitkin, 1992). In Bengkulu, the rapid deployment of 64 tanker trucks by Pertamina was publicly portrayed as a significant accomplishment (Ramalan & Djumena, 2025; Sa'adah et al., 2005). However, this intervention did not emerge from institutional reform at the regional level but rather highlighted the region's reliance on central government support. If the local government interprets this reactive approach as an exemplary model of crisis management, it risks reinforcing a false sense of success and foregoing the opportunity for substantive organizational learning and structural improvement.

According to Boin et al. (2005), a crisis can create opportunities for reform when several conditions are present. These include external pressure and a perception of inevitability, where, for example, a fuel shortage compels the government to acknowledge the need for improvements in logistics and local energy resilience. Another factor is disillusionment with existing institutions, as public or internal dissatisfaction with fuel stations or distribution agencies can trigger momentum for institutional change. Political survival incentives also play a role; when a governor perceives the crisis as a threat to their electoral prospects, the learning process may be politicized and presented as part of a broader reform agenda. Lastly, structural opportunities arise in emergency contexts, where the use of special authorities can be justified to enable more effective management of local energy systems.

However, there is little evidence to suggest that Bengkulu Provincial Government is pursuing a reform-oriented strategy. On the contrary, its response indicates a conservative approach aimed at preserving short-term stability. As Boin et al. (2005) note, crisis leaders often default to conservative strategies, focusing on procedural improvements while avoiding fundamental change. This tendency appears to be reflected in Bengkulu's emphasis on coordination and public communication, rather than on transformative reforms in energy governance.

The fuel shortage crisis, in fact, presented a critical opportunity to initiate strategic initiatives such as establishing regional buffer stock systems, enhancing the logistical capacity of Pulau Baai Port, developing a data-driven energy distribution dashboard, and promoting regional regulations to support transparent and efficient energy distribution. The absence of such measures highlights a failure to convert crisis conditions into meaningful institutional learning.

The crisis should have served as a catalyst for deeper organizational learning within the province. However, the response has been limited, lacking in strategic depth, and oriented more toward immediate recovery than long-term transformation. In line with Boin et al. (2005) framework, Bengkulu Provincial Government has failed to engage in double-loop learning—learning that challenges underlying assumptions and policies—and has instead opted for a path that maintains the status quo. No mechanisms for systematic evaluation, independent auditing, or the institutionalization of crisis memory were activated. The overall response was technocratic and did not confront outdated norms or policy frameworks governing energy distribution. Accordingly, this research concludes that the crisis leadership exhibited by Bengkulu Provincial Government can be characterized as “puzzling without powering”: an attempt to comprehend the crisis without the capacity or willingness to drive substantive change. Consequently, the opportunity for transformative learning remains largely unexploited.

4. Conclusions

The fuel shortage crisis in Bengkulu Province serves as compelling case research for examining the capacity of local leadership in managing crisis situations. Within the broader framework of public policy and governance, this crisis extends beyond a mere logistical or operational issue; it constitutes a critical test of institutional resilience, cross-sectoral coordination effectiveness, and the adaptability of local administrative systems under conditions of uncertainty. Based on the analysis conducted, several key findings emerge that underscore the reactive—rather than proactive—nature of the local government’s response and the resulting academic and practical implications.

The fuel shortage crisis in Bengkulu Province reveals key weaknesses in anticipatory planning and highlights the limited authority of local governments within a centralized energy governance system. The reactive response was largely due to the absence of structured contingency mechanisms, while local authorities faced “asymmetric accountability” for issues beyond their control. Infrastructure and logistical limitations worsened the crisis, underscoring the need for improved local fuel reserves and distribution systems. The lack of integration of non-governmental actors also reflects a gap in collaborative crisis governance. Additionally, crisis leadership lacked real-time, data-driven decision-making, pointing to the urgent need for digital energy monitoring and forecasting systems. A fuel allocation prioritization framework is essential, along with a more inclusive and adaptive regional energy policy. Ultimately, the crisis should be viewed as a strategic opportunity to enhance predictive capacity, reform local governance frameworks, and strengthen institutional resilience for future crises.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to express their sincere gratitude to all parties who contributed to the completion of this research.

Author Contribution

The author contributed equally to the conception, design, analysis, and writing of this manuscript.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Ethical Review Board Statement

Not available.

Informed Consent Statement

Not available.

Data Availability Statement

Not available.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declare no conflict of interest.

Open Access

©2025. The author(s). This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third-party material in this article are included in

the article's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this license, visit: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

References

- Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1997). Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective. *Reis*, 1(77/78), 345–348. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40183951>
- Birkland, T. A. (1997). *After Disaster: Agenda Setting, Public Policy, and Focusing Events*. Georgetown University Press.
- Boin, A., Hart, P., Stern, E., Stern, E., & Sundelius, B. (2005). *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership Under Pressure*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bovaird, T., & Löffler, E. (2024). *Public Management and Governance* (5th ed.). Routledge.
- BPS. (2025). *Jumlah Kendaraan Bermotor Menurut Kabupaten/Kota dan Jenis Kendaraan di Provinsi Bengkulu (Unit) Tahun 2024*. <https://bengkulu.bps.go.id/id/statistics-table/3/Vj3NGRGa3dkRk5MTIU1bVNFOTVVbmQyVURSTVFUMDkjMw==/jumlah-kendaraan-bermotor-menurut-kabupaten-kota-dan-jenis-kendaraan-di-provinsi-bengkulu--2019.html>
- Cherp, A., & Jewell, J. (2014). The Concept of Energy Security: Beyond the Four As. *Energy Policy*, 75(1), 415–421. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2014.09.005>
- CNN Indonesia. (2025a). *BBM di Bengkulu Langka, Harganya Tembus RP30 Ribu per Liter*. <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/ekonomi/20250525100916-85-1232900/bbm-di-bengkulu-langka-harganya-tembus-rp30-ribu-per-liter>
- CNN Indonesia. (2025b). *Pertamina Ungkap Biaya Kerok Stok BBM Bengkulu Langka*. <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/ekonomi/20250527151946-85-1233748/pertamina-ungkap-biaya-kerok-stok-bbm-bengkulu-langka>
- Comfort, L. K. (2007). Crisis Management in Hindsight: Cognition, Communication, Coordination, and Control. *Public Administration Review*, 67, 189–197. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2007.00827.x>
- Creswell, J. W. (2024). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Denhardt, J. V., & Denhardt, R. B. (2015). *The New Public Service: Serving, Not Steering*. Routledge.
- Elisha, O. D. (2021). Resources Scarcity and Sustainable Economic Growth. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education*, 14(1), 43–44. [https://www.ijсре.com.ng/assets/vol.%2C-14\(1\)-elisha%2C-o.-d..pdf](https://www.ijсре.com.ng/assets/vol.%2C-14(1)-elisha%2C-o.-d..pdf)
- Hall, P. A. (1993). Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State: The Case of Economic Policymaking in Britain. *Comparative Politics*, 25(3), 275–296. <https://doi.org/10.2307/422246>
- Harahap, N. G., & Ishak, I. (2016). *Analisis Kelangkaan Bahan Bakar Minyak Premium di Stasiun Pengisian Bahan Bakar Umum (Spbu) Kabupaten Karimun Tahun 2013-2014*. Riau University.
- Hart, P. 't, & Tummings, L. (2019). *Understanding Public Leadership*. Red Globe Press.
- Hood, C. (2002). The Risk Game and the Blame Game. *Government and Opposition*, 37(1), 15–37. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1477-7053.00085>
- Mayasari, A., & Musriadi. (2025). *Pemkot Bengkulu terapkan WFH ASN Atasi Dampak Kelangkaan BBM*. ANTARA News Bengkulu.
- Muliawati, F. D. (2025). *Heboh BBM di Bengkulu Langka, ini Penjelasan Pertamina*. CNBC Indonesia. <https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/news/20250526123116-4-636200/heboh-bbm-di-bengkulu-langka-ini-penjelasan-pertamina>
- Oktavia, V. (2025). *BBM Langka di Bengkulu, Antrean Mengular di SPBU*. Kompas.Id. <https://www.kompas.id/artikel/bbm-langka-di-bengkulu-antrean-di-spbu-mengular-sampai-dua-kilometer>
- Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G. R. (2009). *The External Control of Organizations: A Resource*

- Dependence Perspective*. Stanford University Press.
- Rahayu, R., & Gandhi, G. (2025). *Bagaimana Upaya Pertamina Atasi kelangkaan BBM di Bengkulu?* Tempo.Co. <https://www.tempo.co/ekonomi/bagaimana-upaya-pertamina-atasi-kelangkaan-bbm-di-bengkulu--1563659>
- Ramalan, S., & Djumena, E. (2025). *Atasi Kelangkaan BBM di Bengkulu, Pertamina Kerahkan 64 Mobil Tangki*. Kompas.Com. <https://money.kompas.com/read/2025/05/29/184100526/atasi-kelangkaan-bbm-di-bengkulu-pertamina-kerahkan-64-mobil-tangk>
- Rosenthal, U., Boin, A., & Comfort, L. K. (2001). *Managing Crises: Threats, Dilemmas, Opportunities*. Charles C Thomas Publisher.
- Sa'adah, A. F., Fauzi, A., & Juanda, B. (2017). Peramalan Penyediaan dan Konsumsi Bahan Bakar Minyak Indonesia dengan Model Sistem Dinamik. *Jurnal Ekonomi Dan Pembangunan Indonesia*, 17(2), 118–137. <https://doi.org/10.21002/jepi.v17i2.02>
- Samuelson, P. A., & Nordhaus, W. D. (2010). *Economics* (19th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
- Sitkin, S. B. (1992). Learning Through Failure: The Strategy of Small Losses. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 14(1), 231–266. <https://cir.nii.ac.jp/crid/1570572700925495040>
- Staw, B. M., Sandelands, L. E., & Dutton, J. E. (1981). Threat Rigidity Effects in Organizational Behavior: A Multilevel Analysis. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 26(4), 501–524. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2392337>
- Suci, N. W. (2024). Kelangkaan Minyak Bumi yang Dapat Menghambat Jalannya Perekonomian Masyarakat di Daerah Jawa Timur. *E-Jurnal Ekonomi Sumberdaya Dan Lingkungan*, 13(2), 93–104. <https://doi.org/10.22437/jesl.v13i2.21145>
- Supandi, H. (2025). *BBM Di Bengkulu Langka, Pemprov Minta Tambah Kuota*. *detiksumbagsel*. <https://www.detik.com/sumbagsel/bisnis/d-7932546/bbm-di-bengkulu-langka-pemprov-minta-tambah-kuota>
- Syarif, D., Wahyu, W. D., Yani, A., Bustami, Y. R., & Hidayat, D. (2024). Kelangkaan (Scarcity) Ekonomi: Perbedaan dan Kecocokan Perspektif Islam. *Jurnal Bisnis, Manajemen & Ekonomi*, 21(2), 884–895. <https://doi.org/10.33197/jbme.vol21.iss2.2023.1368>
- Vaughan, D. (1996). *The Challenger Launch Decision: Risky Technology, Culture, and Deviance at NASA*. University of Chicago.
- Watra, B. L., & Musriadi. (2025). *BPS: Kelangkaan BBM Bengkulu Tak Pengaruhi Inflasi Daerah*. ANTARA News Bengkulu. <https://bengkulu.antaranews.com/berita/416709/bps-kelangkaan-bbm-bengkulu-tak-pengaruhi-inflasi-daerah>
- Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Sage Publications.

Biography of Author

Muhammad Adnan Al Kadly Kanedy, master's degree in public policy and administration, Universitas Indonesia. Area of expertise focuses on democracy and local governance, with active involvement in research and teaching on community participation, leadership, decentralization, and strengthening local governance for inclusive democratic practices

- Email: muhammad.adnan18@ui.ac.id
- ORCID: N/A
- Web of Science ResearcherID: N/A
- Scopus Author ID: N/A
- Homepage: N/A