

Governance, Public Value, and Social Conflicts in Indigenous Territories: A Critical Review of the Literature from Latin America

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Abstract

The state's management of social conflicts in Indigenous territories has attracted growing academic interest throughout Latin America. This article conducts a qualitative scoping review, grounded in thematic analysis, of 80 scholarly sources addressing governance, public value, and social conflict in contexts marked by historical exclusion. The review examines the main theories, methodological approaches, and analytical categories that clarify how the State generates, confronts, or transforms conflict dynamics in Indigenous and rural territories.

The findings reveal five critical gaps: limited theoretical integration, weak systematization of state-led initiatives, marginal visibility of Andean cases, the lack of an operational intercultural approach, and insufficient co-creation of public value. Drawing on these insights, the article outlines a research agenda that connects governance, territory, and interculturality, and proposes the Integrated Theory of Collaborative Conflict Management (ITCCM) as a conceptual framework to guide future empirical studies, including research in the Coata River basin (Peru).

Keywords: collaborative governance, public value, structural conflict, conflict resolution, interculturality.

Introduction

Over recent decades, Latin America has witnessed multiple forms of social conflict linked to the territorial expansion of capital, state-driven intervention in natural resources, and collective claims for rights. These disputes challenge not only the State's legitimacy but also its capacity to act as a guarantor of social justice, environmental sustainability, and institutional cohesion. Within this context, social conflicts emerging in Indigenous or rural territories rarely function as isolated events; instead, they reflect structural manifestations of a persistent tension among development models, systems of representation, and demands for recognition (Gurr, 2016; Galtung, 1990; Ugarte, 2020).

The research sought to critically examine the state of the art on state-led management of social conflicts through an analytical perspective that brings together four key theoretical approaches: New Public Governance (Osborne, 2010), the Multidimensional Theory of Public Value (Alford & O'Flynn, 2009; Bryson et al., 2016), Structural Conflict Theory (Coser, 1967; Galtung, 1990), and Collaborative Resolution Frameworks (Moore, 2014; Fisher et al., 1991). This review works under the premise that conflict dynamics in territories such as the Coata River basin in the southern Peruvian Andes cannot be understood solely as consequences of state absence or technical failure; instead, they arise from historically unbalanced power relations, differentiated forms of citizenship, and the weak institutionalization of intercultural dialogue (Orellana, 2015; Yrigoyen, 2011).

The study aims to address the following research question: How has the specialized literature examined the relationship among the State, social conflicts, and governance in territories where ethnic, environmental, and political recognition guide local demands? To answer this question, the analysis unfolds along four dimensions: (1) the predominant conceptual frameworks in the literature, (2) the contributions and limitations of empirical studies, (3) the theoretical and methodological gaps identified, and (4) a forward-looking research agenda that strengthens an integrated understanding of social conflicts. Such an agenda requires not only normative frameworks but also a situated approach attentive to local agency and the interplay between governance structures and knowledge systems (Garafonova & Stadnychuk, 2021; Silima, 2016). Recent studies also warn that tensions around access to essential resources—such as water or land—continue to deepen structural inequalities, particularly in peripheral regions where state presence remains weak or ambiguous (Díaz Bravo, 2020; Lauracio Ticona et al., 2023). These dynamics push scholars and practitioners to rethink governance through a plural, participatory, and intercultural lens, aligned with proposals that articulate territorial and decentralized approaches (Conejero Paz, 2014; Hofmann, 2023; Georgakopoulos, 2017).

The results presented here form part of a broader research effort aimed at developing a theoretical proposal entitled the Integrated Theory of Collaborative Conflict Management (ITCCM). This framework seeks to explain and guide state intervention in contexts shaped by structural, territorial, and intercultural conflict. The present review provides the initial conceptual foundation for that formulation.

Methodological Approach to the Review

The study adopted a qualitative scoping review strategy designed to map, synthesize, and critically interrogate theoretical and empirical contributions regarding state-led management of social conflicts in territories marked by high socio-environmental conflictivity and cultural complexity (Booth, Papaioannou & Sutton, 2016). The search unfolded iteratively across Scopus, Web of Science, and SciELO, complemented by reference tracking and the identification of key books and chapters on governance, public value, and structural conflict. The temporal scope focused primarily on publications between 2019 and 2024, with the deliberate inclusion of classic works (e.g., Coser, 1967; Galtung, 1990; Gurr, 1970/2016) due to their foundational relevance for theories of conflict and structural violence.

The inclusion criteria encompassed: (a) theoretical or empirical studies on governance, public value, socio-environmental conflicts, interculturality, or state conflict management; (b) research centered on Latin America or comparative analyses involving Indigenous or rural territories; (c) peer-reviewed publications (indexed journal articles, academic books, and book chapters); and (d) full-text availability in Spanish, English, or Portuguese. Exclusion criteria involved: (a) normative or policy documents lacking conceptual or empirical analysis; (b) non-peer-reviewed grey literature (internal reports, press releases, etc.), with occasional exceptions for contextual relevance; and (c) studies addressing conflicts without reference to the State or governance structures (e.g., purely psychological or microeconomic analyses of conflict).

Analytical reading and selection followed three transversal criteria: (a) thematic relevance to governance, public value, conflict, and interculturality; (b) theoretical and empirical significance for Latin American contexts; and (c) academic quality regarding sources and authorship. The final corpus was classified into six emergent categories: (1) collaborative governance, (2) public value, (3) structural conflict, (4) social dialogue and institutionalization of conflict, (5) territorial management and interculturality, and (6) qualitative methodological approaches.

The analysis employed multi-cycle qualitative coding procedures (Saldaña, 2021), combined with reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021) and inductive categorization techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 2002). This methodological strategy facilitated the identification of conceptual patterns, theoretical disconnects, and methodological gaps that underpin the development of the Integrated Theory of Collaborative Conflict Management (ITCCM).

Theoretical Framework **New Public Governance (NPG)**

New Public Governance (NPG) has emerged as one of the most influential approaches for analyzing the transformation of the State's role in contexts marked by institutional complexity and pluralism. Osborne (2010) argues that NPG diverges from Traditional Public Administration and New Public Management (NPM) by emphasizing horizontal relationships, interinstitutional coordination, and collaboration with non-state actors. This perspective helps

reconsider state management of conflicts as a dynamic network composed of multiple centers of power and deliberation (Klijn, 2012; Wiesel & Modell, 2014).

In contexts such as the Coata River basin—where local institutions, social movements, and state technical agencies interact—NPG enables researchers to view governance as a shared process. Under this lens, the State no longer functions as an omnipotent actor; instead, it operates as a broker that mobilizes networks and facilitates consensus-building (Quintero, 2017; Silima, 2016).

Multidimensional Public Value Theory

Building on Moore's (1995) foundational contributions, and expanded by scholars such as Alford and O'Flynn (2009) and Bryson et al. (2016), the Multidimensional Public Value Theory maintains that state action should not revolve solely around efficiency or financial performance. Rather, it should focus on generating socially legitimate outcomes, meaningful services, and institutional trust. This framework introduces the notion of public value co-creation, recognizing that citizens and social organizations act not merely as users but as co-producers of public policies (Kelly et al., 2002).

This theory proves essential for interpreting how spaces of legitimacy emerge—or fail to emerge—in conflict-prone territories where the State confronts longstanding trust deficits and must craft solutions that integrate equity, sustainability, and participatory criteria (Conejero Paz, 2014; Garzón Castrillón, 2020).

Structural and Cultural Conflict Theories

The literature on social conflict has evolved from functionalist approaches (Coser, 1967) toward structural perspectives that interpret conflict as an expression of historical, cultural, and territorial inequalities (Gurr, 2016; Galtung, 1990). Within this tradition, authors such as Acharya (2011) and Reboratti (2012) argue that conflict emerges from the collision between exogenous development projects and local ways of life, a dynamic that generates disputes over territory, identity, and institutional power.

Galtung (1990) differentiates among direct, structural, and cultural violence, enabling analysts to view conflict not only as a physical act but also as a persistent form of symbolic exclusion. These contributions hold particular relevance for contexts such as Coata, where conflict extends beyond material demands and intertwines with processes of cultural invisibilization and the erosion of collective life (Durand Guevara, 2023; Yrigoyen, 2011).

Conflict Resolution and Social Dialogue

Finally, the conflict-resolution approach incorporates perspectives from interest-based negotiation (Fisher et al., 1991), transformative mediation (Moore, 2014; Georgakopoulos, 2017), and community-driven models adapted to intercultural contexts (Fundación Gizagune, 2010). Dialogue functions not merely as a technical instrument but as a political-institutional mechanism for recognition and transformation (Orellana, 2015).

In the Peruvian case, studies such as Ugarte (2020) and Sexton (2019) demonstrate that the success or failure of these mechanisms largely depends on their effective institutionalization, the legitimacy of representatives, and the inclusion of diverse actors under equitable conditions.

To reinforce conceptual coherence and precision, the article synthesizes below the key concepts employed and their operational definitions. This systematization clarifies how each category aligns with the Integrated Theory of Collaborative Conflict Management (ITCCM) and prevents ambiguous uses of notions such as structural conflict, public-value co-creation, or operational interculturality.

Table 1. Key Concepts and Operational Definitions Used in the Article

Concept	Operational Definition Used in the Article	Main Reference Authors	Specific Contribution to the ITCCM
Collaborative Governance	Multilevel and multi-actor coordination arrangement through which the State shares decision-making capacities with other public, private, and community actors by means of networks, agreements, and joint deliberation mechanisms.	Osborne (2010); Klijn (2012); Wiesel & Modell (2014)	Positions conflicts as governance processes rather than merely administrative or legal failures.
Co-creation of Public Value	Process through which the State and social actors jointly define problems, priorities, and interventions, sharing resources and responsibilities to generate socially legitimate outcomes.	Moore (1995); Alford & O'Flynn (2009); Bryson et al. (2016)	Enables assessment of whether state conflict management fosters trust, legitimacy, and collective goods.
Structural Conflict	Persistent configuration of material, institutional, and symbolic inequalities that produces chronic tensions among social groups, beyond isolated episodes of protest or violence.	Galtung (1990); Gurr (2016); Acharya (2011)	Clarifies the deep and recurrent roots of conflicts in Indigenous and rural territories.
Operational Interculturality	Set of institutional arrangements, capacities, and practices that translate cultural diversity into concrete rules, procedures, and mechanisms for equitable participation.	Yrigoyen (2011); Durand Guevara (2023); Oviedo & Álvarez (2023)	Allows evaluation of whether interculturality evolves from normative discourse into effective management mechanisms.
Collaborative Conflict Resolution	Approach that prioritizes structured dialogue, mediation, and interest-based negotiation to establish long-term relationships and consensual, sustainable agreements.	Fisher et al. (1991); Moore (2014); Georgakopoulos (2017)	Provides tools for designing state-led processes of dialogue and mediation oriented toward structural and intercultural conditions.

Critical Review of the Literature

Academic literature on social conflicts in Latin America has produced significant theoretical and empirical contributions over the last two decades. Nevertheless, existing approaches often remain fragmented across institutional, cultural, legal, and territorial perspectives, without achieving a coherent articulation capable of explaining how the State confronts—or reproduces—social conflicts in contexts such as the Coata River basin. This section structures the analysis around four key dimensions: (1) governance in conflict-prone contexts, (2) the construction of public value within contested territories, (3) the dynamics of actors, power, and participation, and (4) the tensions that unfold among legality, legitimacy, and interculturality.

Governance and State Management in Conflict-Intensive Contexts

The shift from hierarchical administrative models toward collaborative governance frameworks has been widely documented in the literature (Osborne, 2010; Klijn, 2012). However, practical

implementation in highly conflictive territories exposes a persistent gap between normative expectations and actual institutional dynamics. Scholars such as Wiesel and Modell (2014), Thomann et al. (2019), and Evans & Wellstead (2014) highlight the prevalence of institutional hybridity, where hierarchical, market-oriented, and network-based logics coexist, generating tensions that obstruct coordinated state action and widen the distance between central and subnational levels.

From a comparative perspective, Silima (2016) argues that democratic governance consolidates only when horizontal accountability mechanisms gain recognition and when communities engage actively in decision-making processes. In Latin America, governance processes in rural or Indigenous areas frequently reflect deficits in intergovernmental coordination, limited state responsiveness, and weak institutional legitimacy (Orellana, 2015; Esman, 1997). Empirical studies from Peru, Mexico, and Argentina indicate that despite attempts to promote multilevel coordination, the absence of stable dialogue mechanisms prevents the consolidation of effective territorial governance models (Reboratti, 2012; Ugarte, 2020).

Public Value Construction in Contested Territories

The public value literature has evolved from a performance-centered perspective toward a multidimensional view that incorporates legitimacy, justice, and socially meaningful outcomes (Moore, 1995; Alford & O'Flynn, 2009). In territories such as the Coata River basin—where communities perceive a long-standing pattern of state neglect—the concept of public value enables an assessment of how relationships of trust, equity, and institutional effectiveness develop or deteriorate.

Bryson et al. (2016) propose a co-creation framework that actively involves multiple actors in the formulation of public solutions. However, various studies (Garzón Castrillón, 2020; Sexton, 2019) warn that in highly conflictive contexts, the State frequently fails to act as a facilitator of public value and instead obstructs it—whether through omission or through policies that reinforce structural exclusion. The challenge, therefore, lies in operationalizing public value in settings marked by low legitimacy, which demands institutional innovation and intercultural recognition.

Experiences such as community-based resource management in Roatán, Honduras, illustrate strong local participation in environmental governance—an approach that contrasts with the Peruvian Andes, where such cases remain scarcely documented (León & Pettinelli, 2021). This comparison underscores the central role that local knowledge and practices play in constructing public value and strengthening state legitimacy.

Actors, Power, and Participation

The dynamics of social conflicts are deeply shaped by interactions among actors holding different levels of power, legitimacy, and institutional capacity. Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) contributes to identifying the diversity of interests at stake, while scholars such as Patay et al. (2023) and Lee et al. (2017) emphasize the need to include community actors and intermediary organizations in public-policy design. In this line of thought, Georgakopoulos (2017) highlights

the role of transformative mediation as a key approach for articulating identity recognition, rebuilding relationships, and preventing violent escalation in complex conflicts.

In the types of contexts analyzed, conflicts rarely emerge solely from the presence of extractive projects; instead, they arise from the structural exclusion of social actors from decision-making processes, a condition that reproduces historical asymmetries (Galtung, 1990; Acharya, 2011). Peruvian case studies (Ugarte, 2020; Orellana, 2015) show that dialogue roundtables often operate under vertical logics, while local actors remain unacknowledged as legitimate interlocutors—an issue that diminishes the effectiveness of dialogue and deepens distrust toward the State.

Social network analysis (Borgatti et al., 2018) and power-structure analysis (Esquivel, 2009) offer essential tools for mapping relationships among actors and anticipating risk areas within conflict governance.

Tensions Among Legality, Legitimacy, and Interculturality

One of the most persistent limitations in state-led management of social conflicts involves the tension between the State's formal legality and the social and cultural legitimacy claimed by local actors. Prior consultation, established as a right within international frameworks (Yrigoyen, 2011), often undergoes instrumental or delayed implementation, which undermines its effectiveness as a preventive mechanism. Moreover, the literature shows that in Indigenous or peasant territories, legitimacy emerges not from the state apparatus but from locally grounded systems of authority, representation, and deliberation (Durand Guevara, 2023; Gurr, 2016). This disconnect between normative frameworks and local structures generates disputes not only over specific projects but also over the very right to decide.

Studies on structural and cultural violence (Galtung, 1990; Calderón Concha, 2009) help problematize how certain forms of exclusion become normalized in state practice, hindering the recognition of others as full political subjects. This tension also manifests in the State's ambiguity, as it oscillates between repression and dialogue, centralization and autonomy, without a coherent policy for building territorial peace. In this vein, Cadarzo Lorenzo (2001) argues that analyses of social conflict must incorporate historicity, local political culture, and divergent worldviews to avoid normative reductionism in complex contexts.

Discussion

The systematic analysis of 80 theoretical and empirical sources on social conflicts, public governance, and public value in Latin American contexts reveals five major gaps in the field (Booth, Papaioannou & Sutton, 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2021; Saldaña, 2021). These gaps constrain a comprehensive understanding of how the State manages social conflicts in complex territories such as the Coata River basin.

Theoretical Fragmentation and Limited Integration Across Approaches

One of the most significant gaps concerns the weak theoretical integration among governance approaches, conflict theories, and public value perspectives. For instance, studies on collaborative governance often focus on institutional design and coordination arrangements (Osborne, 2010; Klijn, 2012; Bell & Olivier, 2022), while the literature on structural conflict and violence concentrates on historical inequalities and contested identities without engaging with concrete public-management instruments (Galtung, 1990; Gurr, 2016; Brosché, 2023). This disconnect prevents a holistic understanding of conflicts as multidimensional processes that simultaneously traverse institutional, territorial, and cultural arenas.

Expected contribution: The ITCCM provides an integrative framework that connects New Public Governance, Public Value Theory, and structural and transformative conflict theories, offering a complex and context-sensitive interpretation of state action in Indigenous and rural territories.

Marginalization of Andean Cases and Limited Territorial Perspectives

Although the literature on socio-environmental conflicts in Latin America has expanded significantly, studies continue to privilege urban, Amazonian, or borderland contexts (Reboratti, 2020; Hofmann, 2022), while the southern Peruvian Andes remain only marginally represented. Even in research that focuses specifically on the Coata River basin, attention usually centers on water contamination and related health impacts (Quispe Mamani et al., 2020; Cornejo-Olarte et al., 2022), without offering a detailed examination of governance arrangements or state conflict-management mechanisms. This territorial invisibilization restricts opportunities for systematic comparison with other Latin American cases and limits the extraction of replicable public-policy lessons.

Expected contribution: The study of the Coata River basin—proposed as the empirical application of the ITCCM—will help bridge this gap by making visible a highly representative Andean case where disputes over water, institutional tensions, and Indigenous worldviews converge.

The State as a Technical–Administrative Actor

A substantial portion of the literature examines state action through an instrumental and normative lens, focusing on legal frameworks, procedures, and managerial capacities (Garafonova & Stadniychuk, 2021; Díaz Bravo, 2020). In the Peruvian case, studies on conflict-resolution offices reveal mechanisms designed primarily to contain conflict rather than transform it, emphasizing file processing and protocol compliance (Orellana, 2016). Treating the State as a purely technical–administrative actor obscures its relational, cultural, and political dimensions—namely, its role in producing or eroding legitimacy.

Expected contribution: The ITCCM conceptualizes the State as a relational actor that mobilizes networks, generates legitimacy, and facilitates public value. This perspective enables a deeper analysis of both the State's capacities and its limitations when addressing and transforming structural conflicts.

Limited Systematization of Lessons in Conflict Resolution

Although numerous dialogue roundtables, multisectoral commissions, and negotiation processes have taken place across the region—particularly around infrastructure projects and natural resources—the literature shows a weak systematization of these experiences. Recent work on megaprojects and territorial justice documents processes of eviction, resettlement, and negotiation that rarely receive detailed analysis from which governance lessons could be extracted (Rodríguez & Pérez, 2024; Hernández et al., 2021; Oyarzún et al., 2020). As a result, each territory “starts from zero,” lacking comparative frameworks or clear typologies of state conflict-resolution mechanisms.

Expected contribution: Building on the analysis of the Coata case and its comparison with other processes, the ITCCM aims to contribute an empirical typology of state conflict-resolution mechanisms, assessing their effectiveness, legitimacy, and long-term sustainability.

Weak Incorporation of Interculturality as an Operational Category

Interculturality occupies a central position in public-policy discourse, yet few studies treat it as an analytical and operational category capable of explaining how power, knowledge, and representation are negotiated within conflict arenas. In the legal field, prior consultation and the recognition of collective rights represent important advances (Yrigoyen, 2011). However, recent studies show that implementation often occurs belatedly, through formalistic procedures, or only during specific phases of the project cycle (Durand Guevara, 2023; Engle et al., 2022). This gap materializes in dialogue mechanisms that fail to adequately recognize local forms of authority and Indigenous worldviews.

Expected contribution: The research agenda derived from this review seeks to operationalize interculturality as a cross-cutting dimension of collaborative conflict management, incorporating elements such as free, prior, and informed consent; legitimate representation; territorial reciprocity; and intercultural translation within negotiation processes.

Priority Lines for the Future Research Agenda

Building on the gaps identified, the following lines of research and action seek to advance the understanding and improvement of state-led conflict management:

- Comparative case studies of conflicts in Andean river basins, incorporating territorial and ethnic perspectives.
- Critical assessment of state-led dialogue and prevention initiatives in socio-environmental conflicts.
- Development of methodological frameworks that integrate network analysis, qualitative coding, and grounded theory.

- Construction of public-value indicators applicable to territories characterized by low state legitimacy.
- Analysis of effective intercultural practices within negotiation, consultation, and
- agreement processes.

Conclusions

The critical literature review conducted identifies significant gaps in the academic treatment of state-led management of social conflicts in Indigenous and rural territories. The thematic analysis of 80 sources revealed theoretical fragmentation across governance, conflict, and public value; limited visibility of Andean cases; a predominantly technical–administrative interpretation of the State; weak systematization of conflict-resolution experiences; and an interculturality that operates more at the declarative than at the practical level. These findings confirm that conflicts should not be interpreted as inevitable externalities but rather as structural manifestations of the disconnection between state frameworks and local realities.

From a public-policy perspective, the review suggests at least three practical implications. First, the need to strengthen multilevel governance mechanisms that articulate central, subnational, and community authorities through stable arrangements with clear accountability provisions and opportunities for effective participation. Second, the importance of designing conflict-management systems that integrate public-value indicators—legitimacy, trust, recognition, and social usefulness—beyond administrative efficiency targets. Third, the urgency of institutionalizing qualitative analysis capacities, systematic documentation of experiences, and participatory evaluation so that learning emerges from dialogue processes rather than simply “closing” cases.

Within this context, the Integrated Theory of Collaborative Conflict Management (ITCCM) stands as an original contribution that not only links existing approaches but reconfigures them in response to Latin American realities. Unlike models that examine governance, public value, or structural conflict in isolation, the ITCCM integrates four dimensions: (a) New Public Governance, which emphasizes multilevel and multi-actor action; (b) Public Value Theory, which centers on co-production and the legitimacy of state interventions; (c) Structural Conflict Theory, which explains the historical and territorial roots of violence and exclusion; and (d) Collaborative Conflict Resolution, which guides the construction of sustainable solutions through dialogic and intercultural processes. This integration provides a conceptual architecture capable of informing both analysis and policy design in conflict management.

Although the ITCCM draws inspiration from specific contexts—particularly the Coata River basin in the southern Peruvian Andes—its design remains sufficiently flexible to adapt and scale to other Indigenous and rural territories in Latin America. Its emphasis on territory, interculturality, and public value allows for systematic comparison across river basins, projects, and countries, provided that adaptations incorporate each case’s institutional and cultural particularities. Future research, grounded in in-depth case studies and comparative designs, will play a key role in empirically validating the ITCCM, refining its components, and assessing its

potential as a tool for governance design and collaborative conflict-management policy in the region.

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