

CIVIL SOCIETY ADVOCACY AND THE PROTECTION OF PUBLIC INTEREST IN WEST NUSA TENGGARA

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Abstract

This article examines how civil society advocacy contributes to the protection of public interest in West Nusa Tenggara. The central problem addressed here is that the public interest rarely protects itself through formal constitutional recognition alone. In decentralized democratic settings, public interest requires intermediaries able to interpret grievances, aggregate demands, monitor institutions, circulate public information, and transform dispersed social vulnerability into actionable claims. The article employs a qualitative design based on literature review and document analysis. The sources include civil society theory, advocacy scholarship, Indonesian decentralization studies, public-service accountability literature, official regional documents, reports on migrant-worker protection, disaster-governance materials, and publicly available data relevant to West Nusa Tenggara. The findings show that civil society advocacy in West Nusa Tenggara is most effective when it operates through five interconnected functions: issue translation, associational representation, institutional monitoring, cross-sector coalition building, and public-interest framing. These functions are particularly important in a provincial context marked by geographic dispersion, strong village and religious networks, labor migration, recurring disaster risk, service-access inequality, and the continuing need for transparent complaint handling. The article argues that the protection of public interest in West Nusa Tenggara depends less on episodic protest alone than on the sustained ability of civil society to build durable advocacy infrastructures linking citizens, media, local institutions, and policy arenas. The paper concludes that democratic deepening in the province requires stronger civic research capacity, wider complaint-based accountability, more inclusive representation of vulnerable groups, and institutional arrangements that treat civil society not as an external disturbance but as a constitutive force in public governance.

Keywords: civil society; public interest; advocacy; local democracy; West Nusa Tenggara; accountability

Introduction

The public interest is one of the most frequently invoked yet most contested ideas in democratic governance. It often appears in policy language, administrative justification, electoral rhetoric, and legal argument. Yet the concept becomes institutionally meaningful only when social groups possess the capacity to define injuries, identify exclusions, monitor decisions, and press institutions to respond. In that sense, the public interest is not merely an abstract moral horizon.

It is a practical field of contestation in which some voices become audible while others remain dispersed, privatized, or administratively invisible.¹

Civil society occupies a strategic position in this field. Democratic theory has long treated associational life as the arena in which citizens develop habits of cooperation, mutual trust, public judgment, and organized resistance to arbitrary power. Yet civil society does more than socialize citizens into democratic virtues. It also performs mediating labor. It translates everyday problems into public issues, carries claims across institutional boundaries, and converts moral grievance into recognizable forms of advocacy.² For that reason, the relation between civil society and public interest cannot be reduced to charitable activity or symbolic participation. It concerns the capacity of organized citizens to shape what counts as a legitimate common concern and to compel a response from institutions that claim to govern in the public name.³

This question becomes particularly important in decentralized settings such as Indonesia, where subnational politics redistributes authority across provincial, district, and municipal arenas. Decentralization widened opportunities for local participation and public oversight, yet it also multiplied sites of elite brokerage, institutional fragmentation, and uneven service delivery.⁴ In such contexts, public interest is not secured by decentralization automatically. It depends on civic actors able to inhabit and contest the new governance architecture. Civil society organizations, community associations, religious groups, legal-aid institutions, issue-based coalitions, labor networks, women's organizations, youth initiatives, media communities, and digital advocacy platforms become crucial because they connect citizens to dispersed state institutions and public decision-making channels.⁵

West Nusa Tenggara provides an important locus for examining this problem. The province combines dense village life, urbanizing centers, a large migrant-worker population, disaster exposure, tourism-led development pressures, social inequality across territories, and a governance landscape in which service delivery, information access, and social protection remain central concerns. Official regional planning documents stress inclusive development, service improvement, disaster resilience, and the importance of cross-sector participation in provincial development.⁶ Public data also depict a province with a geographically varied population, ongoing welfare

¹ Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), ix-xxii; David Beetham, *Democracy and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 89-112.

² Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 87-115; Warren, *Democracy and Association*, 60-94.

³ Larry Diamond, "Rethinking Civil Society: Toward Democratic Consolidation," *Journal of Democracy* 5, no. 3 (1994): 4-17.

⁴ James Manor, *The Political Economy of Democratic Decentralization* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1999), 1-24; Edward Aspinall and Greg Fealy, eds., *Local Power and Politics in Indonesia: Decentralisation and Democratisation* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003), 1-16.

⁵ Vedi R. Hadiz, *Localising Power in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia: A Southeast Asia Perspective* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 1-28; Olle Törnquist, Stanley Adi Prasetyo, and Tatag Tatmanto, eds., *Popular Politics of Representation* (Yogyakarta: PCD Press, 2009), 1-18.

⁶ Pemerintah Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, *Perda No. 6 Tahun 2025 tentang RPJMD NTB 2025-2029* (Mataram: Pemerintah Provinsi NTB, 2025); SiAGA NTB, *Rencana Penanggulangan Bencana Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat 2025* (Mataram: Pemerintah Provinsi NTB, 2025).

challenges, and public-service agendas that require coordinated institutional response rather than isolated administrative action.⁷

The provincial setting sharpens the need for advocacy because public injury in West Nusa Tenggara often appears in relational and dispersed forms. One set of concerns arises around migrant-worker protection, where recruitment practices, information asymmetry, family vulnerability, and returnee reintegration create a field in which rights are exposed to mediation failures.⁸ Another concerns public services, where complaint handling, transparency, and administrative responsiveness shape the everyday credibility of the democratic state.⁹ A third emerges in disaster governance, especially because local communities in the province repeatedly negotiate risk, preparedness, relocation, and recovery through unequal access to information and resources.¹⁰ Additional concerns involve land, environmental management, education, health access, and the unequal capacity of citizens to influence planning and monitoring processes.¹¹

In each of these arenas, civil society advocacy matters because the public interest does not appear in a pure or self-evident form. It must be argued, evidenced, narrated, and institutionally anchored. Advocacy therefore entails more than protest. It includes legal accompaniment, public education, complaint aggregation, participatory monitoring, media engagement, policy dialogue, budget scrutiny, community organizing, and coalition building. Advocacy is the work through which diffuse social suffering acquires public legibility and administrative consequence.¹²

This article asks three related questions. First, what does the protection of public interest mean in a provincial democratic setting such as West Nusa Tenggara? Second, through what mechanisms does civil society advocacy contribute to that protection? Third, what structural conditions strengthen or weaken such advocacy? The argument developed here is that civil society advocacy in West Nusa Tenggara becomes democratically consequential when it performs five interconnected functions: translating private grievances into public claims, representing dispersed interests through associations, monitoring institutional conduct, building coalitions across sectors,

⁷ BPS Provinsi NTB, *Nusa Tenggara Barat Province in Figures 2025* (Mataram: BPS Provinsi NTB, 2025); BPS Provinsi NTB, *Nusa Tenggara Barat Province in Figures 2026*.

⁸ Data NTB Prov., “NTB Penyumbang PMI Terbesar ke-4 Nasional,” 2025; Dinas Tenaga Kerja dan Transmigrasi Provinsi NTB, “Disnakertrans NTB Mantapkan Langkah Wujudkan Migrasi Aman melalui Penguatan Kapasitas Konselor Lokal,” October 29, 2025.

⁹ Ombudsman Republik Indonesia, *Laporan Tahunan 2024* (Jakarta: Ombudsman RI, 2025); Pemerintah Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, “Tingkatkan Kualitas Layanan Publik, Pemprov Dorong Masyarakat Gunakan Layanan Aduan,” June 2, 2025.

¹⁰ SiAGA NTB, “Konsultasi Publik Dokumen Rencana Aksi Pembinaan dan Pengawasan Penerapan Standar Pelayanan Minimal Sub Urusan Bencana di Kabupaten/Kota Provinsi NTB 2025-2029,” May 21, 2025.

¹¹ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2023/2024* (New York: UNDP, 2024), 15-27; World Bank, *World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2017), 3-20.

¹² Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 16-35; Charles Tilly and Lesley J. Wood, *Social Movements 1768-2012*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2015), 1-18.

and framing vulnerable populations as bearers of public concern rather than as isolated beneficiaries.¹³

The article proceeds in IMRAD format. After outlining the qualitative research design, it presents the analytical findings through a structured discussion of advocacy fields, institutional mechanisms, and recurring constraints. The conclusion restates the central argument and identifies practical implications for democratic governance and future research in West Nusa Tenggara.¹⁴

Method

This study uses a qualitative design based on literature review and document analysis. The method is appropriate because the objective is analytical rather than statistical. The article does not attempt to measure the numerical size of every civil society organization in West Nusa Tenggara. It seeks instead to identify how advocacy capacity can be understood conceptually and institutionally in a provincial setting where multiple arenas of public-interest protection intersect.¹⁵

The data sources are grouped into five categories. The first category consists of theoretical and conceptual works on civil society, public interest, advocacy, public sphere, democratic participation, and accountability. These works provide the analytical vocabulary used to interpret civic action and institutional response.¹⁶ The second category consists of scholarship on Indonesian decentralization, local democracy, participatory governance, and civil society-state relations. These materials situate the provincial discussion within broader transformations of post-authoritarian governance.¹⁷ The third category includes official regional materials relevant to West Nusa Tenggara, such as provincial planning documents, statistical publications, public-information materials, public-service data, and provincial datasets.¹⁸ The fourth category includes reports and policy-related materials concerning electoral oversight, migrant-worker protection, public complaints, and disaster governance.¹⁹ The fifth category consists of selected civil society and governance reports that illuminate public-interest advocacy in Indonesia more broadly.²⁰

The analysis proceeded through three stages. First, the materials were read to identify recurring themes related to public injury, representation, accountability, and institutional responsiveness. Second, these themes were organized into a set of advocacy functions and provincial

¹³ Jane Mansbridge, "Rethinking Representation," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 4 (2003): 515-528; Peter P. Houtzager and Adrian Gurza Lavalle, "Civil Society's Claims to Political Representation in Brazil," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 45, no. 1 (2010): 1-29.

¹⁴ Guillermo O'Donnell, "Horizontal Accountability in New Democracies," *Journal of Democracy* 9, no. 3 (1998): 112-126.

¹⁵ Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, 470-562.

¹⁶ Edwards, *Civil Society*, 13-56; Warren, *Democracy and Association*, 95-148; David L. Brown, *Participation and the Public Good in Civil Society* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 9-33.

¹⁷ Hadiz, *Localising Power*, 29-69; Aspinall and Fealy, *Local Power and Politics in Indonesia*, 17-41.

¹⁸ BPS Provinsi NTB, *Nusa Tenggara Barat Province in Figures 2026*; PPID Pemerintah Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, *Daftar Informasi Publik Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat Tahun 2025* (Mataram: PPID NTB, 2025).

¹⁹ Ombudsman Republik Indonesia, *Laporan Triwulan II 2024* (Jakarta: Ombudsman RI, 2024); Bawaslu Provinsi NTB, "Kolaborasi Demokrasi: Bawaslu NTB Gandeng UNIZAR Perkuat Pengawasan Partisipatif," January 27, 2026.

²⁰ Suharko, "NGOs, Public Advocacy and Democratization in Indonesia," *Journal of Social and Political Studies* 12, no. 2 (2008): 145-168; World Bank, *World Development Report 2017*, 227-246.

issue arenas. Third, the article interpreted the resulting patterns using a civil-society framework attentive to both normative and institutional dimensions. This means that advocacy is evaluated not only by the moral worth of its claims but also by its capacity to secure procedural access, evidence production, monitoring continuity, and policy consequence.²¹

The study is limited in two respects. It does not offer ethnographic observation of particular organizations, and it does not provide a quantitative map of all advocacy initiatives in the province. Its contribution lies in a theoretically informed, document-based reconstruction of how civil society advocacy can be understood as a democratic infrastructure for public-interest protection in West Nusa Tenggara.²²

Results and Discussion

West Nusa Tenggara as a Provincial Arena of Public Interest

Public interest in West Nusa Tenggara emerges from the interaction of geography, economy, social organization, and governance structure. The province is not a homogeneous public. It includes urban centers, agricultural zones, coastal and island communities, tourism corridors, migration-sending districts, and disaster-prone areas. Such diversity matters because public interest is never singular in a simple sense. It must be assembled from multiple social conditions whose unequal visibility shapes which claims are recognized and which are deferred.²³

Provincial statistical publications indicate the breadth of this administrative and social field. West Nusa Tenggara combines a sizeable population with varied regional conditions, and these conditions influence access to services, communication infrastructures, mobility patterns, and institutional reach.²⁴ Regional planning documents also identify service quality, inclusive development, risk reduction, and participatory coordination as persistent policy concerns.²⁵ The public interest in this setting therefore involves more than broad development aspiration. It includes concrete matters such as whether citizens can lodge complaints effectively, whether vulnerable workers receive protection, whether communities can influence disaster policy, and whether public resources are managed through transparent and accountable processes.²⁶

Advocacy becomes central because these concerns are not self-translating. Citizens often experience harm in fragmented ways. A family dealing with migrant-worker vulnerability may not experience its problem initially as part of labor-governance failure. Residents facing weak services may normalize administrative delay as routine inconvenience rather than as a rights issue. Communities living with environmental or disaster risk may speak in local moral language rather

²¹ Andreas Schedler, Larry Diamond, and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *The Self-Restraining State: Power and Accountability in New Democracies* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999), 13-28.

²² Simone Chambers and Jeffrey Kopstein, "Bad Civil Society," *Political Theory* 29, no. 6 (2001): 837-865.

²³ Joel S. Migdal, *State in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1-16; Brown, *Participation and the Public Good*, 55-82.

²⁴ BPS Provinsi NTB, *Nusa Tenggara Barat Province in Figures 2026*.

²⁵ Pemerintah Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, *Perda No. 6 Tahun 2025 tentang RPJMD NTB 2025-2029*.

²⁶ Republik Indonesia, *Undang-Undang Nomor 25 Tahun 2009 tentang Pelayanan Publik*; Republik Indonesia, *Undang-Undang Nomor 14 Tahun 2008 tentang Keterbukaan Informasi Publik*.

than in the policy terms that institutions readily recognize. Civil society mediates these transitions. It converts social experience into public argument.²⁷

This mediating function is especially important in provincial democracies where formal participation channels exist but do not automatically equalize voice. Public hearings, planning consultations, complaint systems, and monitoring institutions can widen accountability, yet access to them depends on literacy, organization, confidence, and social brokerage.²⁸ Advocacy matters because it reduces the gap between institutional availability and actual civic use. In this sense, public interest protection depends on civic infrastructures that make participation durable and legible.²⁹

Civil Society Advocacy as Democratic Infrastructure

Advocacy should be understood here as an organized effort to defend or advance claims framed in terms of rights, justice, accountability, inclusion, or common welfare. It includes litigation and policy lobbying, but it also extends to monitoring, media work, public education, complaint facilitation, coalition formation, and community accompaniment. Such a broad understanding is important because many local civil society interventions in Indonesian provinces do not appear first as formal policy campaigns. They begin as assistance, accompaniment, and translation work that later acquires public consequence.³⁰

The first advocacy function is issue translation. Civil society actors identify patterns across scattered grievances and formulate them as public problems. This work is epistemic as much as political. It requires documentation, categorization, testimony collection, legal interpretation, and narrative framing. Without such work, many injuries remain individualized and administratively invisible.³¹ Public-interest advocacy begins when a condition is named as a matter that concerns not merely one victim or one family but a wider normative order of public responsibility.

The second function is associational representation. Civil society organizations do not represent society in an absolute sense, yet they provide a structure through which dispersed populations can articulate claims more effectively. This is especially important for groups whose relation to formal institutions is weak or unequal, including poor households, women facing service barriers, migrant-worker families, residents of remote communities, and citizens who lack procedural literacy.³² Representation here does not erase internal diversity. Its democratic value lies in reducing isolation and enabling repeated engagement with institutions.

The third function is institutional monitoring. Advocacy becomes consequential when it can follow procedures, track commitments, compare regulations with practice, publicize failures, and maintain pressure beyond the moment of scandal. Accountability literature repeatedly shows that

²⁷ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 100-124; Mansbridge, "Rethinking Representation," 520-526.

²⁸ Archon Fung, *Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 3-24.

²⁹ O'Donnell, "Horizontal Accountability in New Democracies," 117-121; Warren, *Democracy and Association*, 154-175.

³⁰ Suharko, "NGOs, Public Advocacy and Democratization in Indonesia," 148-155.

³¹ Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, 525-530.

³² Houtzager and Lavalley, "Civil Society's Claims to Political Representation," 3-12; Mansbridge, "Rethinking Representation," 517-521.

monitoring is strongest when formal oversight institutions interact with societal scrutiny.³³ In the context of West Nusa Tenggara, this includes the use of complaint mechanisms, media exposure, public hearings, electoral monitoring initiatives, and issue-based forums that connect local evidence to public review.³⁴

The fourth function is coalition building. Many public-interest issues cut across sectors. Migrant-worker protection requires coordination among labor agencies, village authorities, service providers, civil society counselors, and families. Disaster resilience requires links among local communities, emergency institutions, planners, and non-governmental actors. Public-service accountability often depends on cooperation between complainants, watchdog institutions, digital platforms, and issue advocates.³⁵ Coalition building therefore expands the scale and durability of advocacy.

The fifth function is public-interest framing. Civil society advocacy protects the public interest most effectively when it can move beyond narrow patronage or transactional claims. Public-interest framing does not eliminate specific demands. It situates them within principles such as equal access, accountability, safety, procedural fairness, transparency, and social dignity. This is how a local grievance enters a broader democratic language.³⁶

Advocacy Fields in West Nusa Tenggara

Public-Service Accountability

One of the clearest arenas in which civil society can protect the public interest is public-service accountability. The quality of health, education, licensing, social assistance, and administrative services shapes the everyday credibility of democratic governance. Citizens do not encounter the state primarily as constitutional theory. They encounter it through offices, procedures, waiting times, information access, complaint handling, and the fairness of treatment.³⁷ For that reason, administrative responsiveness is a substantive democratic issue.

Ombudsman reporting and public-service evaluation materials underscore the continuing national and regional importance of service quality and maladministration oversight.³⁸ Provincial initiatives encouraging the use of public complaint services likewise indicate an institutional recognition that citizen complaint is not a disturbance to governance but an input for governance improvement.³⁹ Civil society advocacy strengthens this arena when organizations help citizens

³³ Schedler, Diamond, and Plattner, *The Self-Restraining State*, 29-47; O'Donnell, "Horizontal Accountability in New Democracies," 123-126.

³⁴ Bawaslu Provinsi NTB, "Bawaslu NTB Apreasiasi Kinerja Bawaslu Kabupaten/Kota," June 12, 2024; Bawaslu Provinsi NTB, "Kolaborasi Demokrasi," January 27, 2026.

³⁵ Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 88-102; Patrick Heller, "Social Capital as Product of Class Mobilization and State Intervention," *World Development* 24, no. 6 (1996): 1055-1071.

³⁶ Beetham, *Democracy and Human Rights*, 113-134; Brown, *Participation and the Public Good*, 83-104.

³⁷ Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Limits of Self-Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 123-147.

³⁸ Ombudsman Republik Indonesia, *Laporan Tahunan 2024; Laporan Triwulan II 2024*.

³⁹ Pemerintah Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, "Tingkatkan Kualitas Layanan Publik, Pemprov Dorong Masyarakat Gunakan Layanan Aduan," June 2, 2025.

articulate complaints, understand procedures, document patterns of exclusion, and transform isolated dissatisfaction into monitored institutional feedback.

This function is significant in West Nusa Tenggara because complaint capacity is unevenly distributed. Some citizens possess the literacy, confidence, and connectivity required to file reports or follow bureaucratic procedures. Others do not. Civil society can narrow this gap by acting as an intermediary. It can assist complainants, publicize systemic issues, press agencies to respond, and maintain visibility when cases risk administrative closure without substantive remedy.⁴⁰ The democratic importance of this work lies in its ability to convert procedural channels into actual accountability.

Migrant-worker protection

A second major advocacy field concerns migrant-worker protection. West Nusa Tenggara is one of Indonesia's important migrant-sending provinces, and recent provincial data continue to show the scale and concentration of overseas labor migration from several districts.⁴¹ Migration generates income and aspiration, yet it also exposes workers and their families to recruitment manipulation, debt, legal vulnerability, workplace abuse, and reintegration difficulties. The public interest in this field concerns not only employment opportunity but safe migration, rights protection, and the social support systems surrounding departure, work, return, and family welfare.⁴²

Civil society advocacy matters here because many migrant-worker harms are mediated through asymmetry of information and unequal bargaining power. Workers may rely on informal brokers, partial information, or community rumor. Families may know that a problem exists but not how to navigate legal and administrative channels. Provincial initiatives related to safe migration, counselor training, and village-based migrant support indicate that this arena increasingly requires collaborative systems rather than isolated government intervention.⁴³

In this context, advocacy protects public interest in at least four ways. It expands access to reliable information before departure. It accompanies workers and families during disputes or crises. It monitors the implementation of protective policy. It reframes migrant workers as rights-bearing citizens rather than as purely economic instruments.⁴⁴ This reframing matters because public-interest language alters the moral and administrative status of the issue. Once migration is treated as a public-governance field, advocacy can demand standards, transparency, and preventive infrastructures rather than merely emergency response.

Disaster Governance and Social Protection

⁴⁰ World Bank, *World Development Report 2017*, 243-248.

⁴¹ Data NTB Prov., "NTB Penyumbang PMI Terbesar ke-4 Nasional," 2025.

⁴² United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2023/2024*, 95-109.

⁴³ Dinas Tenaga Kerja dan Transmigrasi Provinsi NTB, "Disnakertrans NTB Mantapkan Langkah Wujudkan Migrasi Aman melalui Penguatan Kapasitas Konselor Lokal," October 29, 2025; "NTB Jadi Percontohan Nasional Desa Migran Emas," September 12, 2025.

⁴⁴ Suharko, "NGOs, Public Advocacy and Democratization in Indonesia," 156-163.

A third advocacy field concerns disaster governance. West Nusa Tenggara has repeatedly confronted disaster risk, and provincial policy materials continue to treat resilience, preparedness, and minimum service standards in disaster sub-affairs as strategic governance matters.⁴⁵ Disaster is often narrated as a natural event, but democratic analysis shows that its social consequences are shaped by vulnerability, preparedness, communication, relocation policy, and the distribution of recovery resources.⁴⁶ Public interest in disaster settings therefore involves procedural inclusion as much as technical response.

Civil society advocacy enters here through community organization, risk communication, monitoring of aid distribution, participation in consultations, and the defense of vulnerable groups during recovery processes. Provincial resilience planning has acknowledged the involvement of multiple actors, including civil society organizations, universities, and non-governmental institutions.⁴⁷ This recognition is important because disaster policy without civic participation can become technocratic, extractive, or socially blind. Communities possess local knowledge about terrain, livelihoods, social networks, and risk perception. Advocacy ensures that such knowledge is not discarded by administrative simplification.

The same logic applies to social protection more broadly. Whether in disaster response, poverty targeting, or community recovery, public interest is protected when citizens can contest exclusion, demand transparency, and monitor the fairness of aid and service distribution.⁴⁸ Civil society organizations often occupy the space in which formal policy categories meet lived reality. They recognize when beneficiary lists are inaccurate, when vulnerable households are overlooked, or when policy communication fails. Their advocacy can therefore improve not only distributive justice but also the informational accuracy of governance itself.

Transparency, Information Access, and Issue-Based Public Oversight

A fourth field concerns transparency and information access. Democratic protection of public interest depends on the ability of citizens to know how decisions are made, how resources are allocated, and how claims can be pursued. Public-information infrastructures in West Nusa Tenggara, including provincial disclosure lists and digital complaint encouragement, suggest that information openness has become an acknowledged component of governance reform.⁴⁹ Yet openness on paper does not guarantee civic use. Information must be accessible, interpretable, and connected to action.

Civil society advocacy becomes important when it transforms transparency from passive publication into active public oversight. Organizations can interpret budgets, monitor procurement, scrutinize service standards, compare official promises with implementation, and

⁴⁵ SiAGA NTB, *Rencana Penanggulangan Bencana Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat 2025*; SiAGA NTB, “Konsultasi Publik Dokumen Rencana Aksi...,” May 21, 2025.

⁴⁶ World Bank, *World Development Report 2017*, 155-176.

⁴⁷ SiAGA NTB, *Rencana Penanggulangan Bencana Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat 2025*.

⁴⁸ Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*, 183-202.

⁴⁹ PPID Pemerintah Provinsi NTB, *Daftar Informasi Publik Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat Tahun 2025*; Republik Indonesia, *Undang-Undang Nomor 14 Tahun 2008 tentang Keterbukaan Informasi Publik*.

circulate findings in forms usable by ordinary citizens.⁵⁰ Media communities and issue-based networks also matter because they amplify local concerns and widen the audience for institutional scrutiny.

This function is closely related to electoral and democratic oversight. Bawaslu initiatives in the province repeatedly stress participatory supervision and youth involvement in safeguarding electoral integrity.⁵¹ While election monitoring is only one part of public-interest protection, it reveals a wider democratic principle: institutions are more accountable when organized citizens are recognized as co-watchers of public process. The same principle can be extended beyond elections to public services, social assistance, disaster response, and labor governance.

Constraints on Advocacy Capacity

The democratic value of civil society advocacy in West Nusa Tenggara should not be romanticized. Advocacy capacity is uneven and sometimes fragile. The first constraint concerns organizational inequality. Some associations possess legal standing, media access, donor networks, and policy literacy. Others remain localized, informal, or heavily dependent on a few charismatic actors.⁵² This unevenness affects which issues gain public traction and which communities remain weakly represented.

A second constraint concerns patronage and political brokerage. Decentralized politics often opens access while simultaneously encouraging transactional incorporation of social actors into elite networks.⁵³ Civil society organizations may be invited into consultation yet discouraged from sustained criticism. Their participation can be celebrated symbolically while their monitoring role is marginalized. Public-interest advocacy weakens when organizations become too dependent on access controlled by the very institutions they seek to scrutinize.

A third constraint concerns evidentiary capacity. Advocacy requires data, documentation, legal interpretation, and continuity. Many local organizations possess moral credibility and social embeddedness but limited research infrastructure. This makes it harder to transform testimony into persuasive evidence or to follow policy cycles over time.⁵⁴ Without documentation, public issues can be dismissed as anecdotal or politically motivated. Strengthening civic research capacity is therefore part of strengthening democracy itself.

A fourth constraint concerns digital inequality and communication overload. Digital media can amplify advocacy, but they can also fragment publics, accelerate rumor, and reward episodic outrage over sustained monitoring.⁵⁵ In provincial settings, online visibility does not always translate into institutional consequence. Civil society must therefore combine digital communication with offline organizational work, legal accompaniment, and procedural engagement.

⁵⁰ Edwards, *Civil Society*, 93-117.

⁵¹ Bawaslu Provinsi NTB, "Kolaborasi Demokrasi," January 27, 2026.

⁵² Chambers and Kopstein, "Bad Civil Society," 840-851.

⁵³ Hadiz, *Localising Power*, 70-114; Aspinall and Fealy, *Local Power and Politics in Indonesia*, 171-196.

⁵⁴ Brown, *Participation and the Public Good*, 105-124.

⁵⁵ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2023/2024*, 203-214.

A fifth constraint concerns representational closure. Advocacy organizations sometimes speak in the public name while failing to maintain participatory ties with the populations they invoke. When this occurs, civil society risks reproducing a narrow elite public rather than a genuinely plural one.⁵⁶ The protection of public interest requires civic reflexivity. Organizations must remain accountable to constituencies, especially vulnerable groups whose experiences are easily abstracted into policy language without reciprocal participation.

Toward a Stronger Public-Interest Advocacy Regime

The analysis suggests that civil society advocacy in West Nusa Tenggara will become stronger when four strategic shifts occur. First, advocacy must be more infrastructural. Rather than relying mainly on episodic mobilization, civic actors need durable complaint clinics, policy-monitoring teams, documentation systems, and public communication routines.⁵⁷ Durability matters because institutions often outlast public attention.

Second, advocacy must be more collaborative without surrendering critical autonomy. Coalitions among community groups, legal-aid bodies, universities, media actors, religious organizations, and professional associations can widen legitimacy and expertise.⁵⁸ Yet collaboration should not dissolve civil society into administrative partnership alone. Its democratic role includes maintaining an independent capacity to criticize, expose, and demand remedy.

Third, the province would benefit from stronger linkages between issue advocacy and formal accountability channels. Complaint systems, ombudsman mechanisms, public-information procedures, electoral supervision, and development consultations become more effective when civil society organizations know how to use them repeatedly and strategically.⁵⁹ Institutional literacy is therefore a public good.

Fourth, public-interest advocacy should prioritize vulnerable populations in a principled rather than charitable manner. Migrant workers, women facing service barriers, disaster-affected communities, poor households, and citizens in remote areas should appear in advocacy not merely as objects of compassion but as subjects whose rights test the moral seriousness of democratic governance.⁶⁰ This shift strengthens both representation and accountability because it ties the legitimacy of institutions to the treatment of those most exposed to exclusion.

In this respect, the future of civil society advocacy in West Nusa Tenggara depends on whether democratic life is understood as a sequence of events or as an organized civic ecology. Where democracy is treated merely as elections, public interest narrows into competition for office.

⁵⁶ Ingrid van Biezen and Petr Kopecký, "The State and the Associations: The Rise and Decline of Political Parties as Representative Institutions," *Party Politics* 20, no. 5 (2014): 1-13.

⁵⁷ Fung, *Empowered Participation*, 175-199.

⁵⁸ Warren, *Democracy and Association*, 176-210.

⁵⁹ Ombudsman Republik Indonesia, *Laporan Tahunan 2024*; PPID Pemerintah Provinsi NTB, *Daftar Informasi Publik Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat Tahun 2025*.

⁶⁰ Beetham, *Democracy and Human Rights*, 135-149; United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2023/2024*, 27-44.

Where democracy is treated as an ongoing civic order, advocacy becomes part of the very mechanism through which common life is defended.⁶¹

Conclusion

This article has argued that the protection of public interest in West Nusa Tenggara depends substantially on the advocacy capacity of civil society. Public interest in the province appears through concrete arenas such as service accountability, migrant-worker protection, disaster governance, transparency, and issue-based oversight. These arenas are shaped by geographic diversity, institutional dispersion, social inequality, and the uneven capacity of citizens to convert private injury into public claims.

Civil society advocacy becomes democratically significant when it performs five connected functions. It translates social grievance into public issue. It represents dispersed interests through associations. It monitors institutional conduct and complaint systems. It builds coalitions across sectors. It frames vulnerable groups and everyday harms within a wider language of public responsibility. Through these functions, advocacy protects the public interest not as a rhetorical ideal but as a practical achievement of democratic mediation.

The analysis also shows that this capacity remains constrained by organizational inequality, patronage risk, weak evidentiary infrastructure, digital fragmentation, and representational closure. These limits do not diminish the relevance of civil society. They identify the conditions under which advocacy must be strengthened. A more democratic provincial order in West Nusa Tenggara will require durable civic infrastructures, stronger research and documentation practices, wider procedural literacy, and institutional arrangements that recognize organized citizens as legitimate agents of accountability.

The broader implication is clear. Public interest is not fully secured by law, planning, or administrative proclamation. It is secured when citizens are organized enough to defend it, visible enough to name it, and persistent enough to compel institutions to answer for it.⁶²

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⁶¹ Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 163-185; Edwards, *Civil Society*, 118-139.

⁶² Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, 563-658; Diamond, "Rethinking Civil Society," 14-17.

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