

CIVIL SOCIETY CAPACITY IN SAFEGUARDING DEMOCRATIC QUALITY IN MATARAM

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Abstract

This article examines the capacity of civil society to safeguard democratic quality in the city of Mataram. Rather than treating civil society as a moral abstraction, the article approaches it as a practical field of associations, advocacy networks, professional organizations, religious communities, youth groups, media actors, and issue-based coalitions that mediate between citizens and public authority. The main question is how far civil society in Mataram possesses the organizational, communicative, and collaborative capacity required to maintain democratic quality under conditions shaped by local electoral competition, digital information disorder, and institutional fragmentation. The study uses a qualitative document-based method and draws on democratic theory, civil society studies, official local statistics, electoral governance documents, and public reports related to information integrity and participation. The article argues that civil society capacity in Mataram is best understood through five linked dimensions: associative density, civic mediation, participatory institutionalization, information integrity, and advocacy effectiveness. Mataram presents a strategic local setting because it combines the characteristics of an urban administrative center, a relatively dense public sphere, and an increasingly digitalized communication environment. The analysis shows that civil society in Mataram retains meaningful democratic potential, especially in voter education, social oversight, policy communication, and public issue mobilization. At the same time, this capacity remains uneven because many organizations still depend on episodic mobilization, elite mediation, and weak long-term institutionalization. The article concludes that democratic quality in Mataram will depend less on the formal presence of elections alone and more on whether civil society can sustain informed participation, enlarge public accountability, and defend the integrity of local public communication.

Keywords: *Civil Society, Democratic Quality, Local Democracy, Public Sphere, Mataram, Disinformation*

Introduction

Civil society has long occupied a central place in democratic theory because democracy requires more than electoral procedure. It also requires durable civic infrastructures through which citizens learn cooperation, articulate interests, contest domination, and transform private concerns into public questions.¹ From Tocqueville onward, the associational life of citizens has been understood as a training ground for democratic habits because it generates the practical arts of self-organization, reciprocity, and public responsibility.² Later work on civil society expanded this argument by showing that associations do not merely socialize citizens; they also mediate between

¹ Michael Edwards, *Civil Society*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 1-17.

² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 489-92.

state and society, generate countervailing power, and create public arenas in which social demands become politically intelligible.³

This theoretical importance has become more urgent in the contemporary democratic environment. Elections remain essential, yet democratic quality is increasingly shaped by deeper conditions: public trust, information integrity, media credibility, civic participation, and the capacity of citizens to organize outside the state.⁴ Global reports on democracy and information disorder have repeatedly underlined that misinformation, disinformation, polarization, and the weakening of institutional trust now constitute structural pressures on democratic life.⁵ In that setting, civil society cannot be treated as a ceremonial supplement to democracy. It becomes one of the decisive capacities through which democratic life either preserves public reason or slides into manipulation, passivity, and institutional distrust.⁶

The Indonesian case is especially important. Since the democratic transition after 1998, Indonesia has developed a complex democratic order characterized by regular elections, expanded public participation, stronger local politics, and a much more open media sphere than under authoritarian rule.⁷ Yet the expansion of democracy has also generated new vulnerabilities: oligarchic influence, uneven institutional consolidation, criminalization and intimidation in digital space, transactional local politics, and the rapid circulation of misleading political content through social media.⁸ Freedom House continues to classify Indonesia as an electoral democracy with important pluralist gains, yet it also notes persistent challenges related to rule of law, harassment, and the quality of freedom in both offline and online public life.⁹

These pressures are not distributed evenly across space. Local democracy matters because the everyday quality of democratic life is often shaped less by national constitutional language than by the concrete environment of cities and districts: local media ecologies, civic networks, neighborhood associations, educational institutions, local bureaucracies, religious organizations, electoral bodies, and issue-specific advocacy groups. Mataram deserves attention precisely because it is the administrative and urban center of West Nusa Tenggara, a city in which governance, education, services, commerce, civil associations, and electoral activities are concentrated.¹⁰ Official statistics portray Mataram as an urban municipality with dense administrative functions and a

³ Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), ix-xxix; Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 27-56.

⁴ Robert A. Dahl, *On Democracy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 37-43; Charles Tilly, *Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 13-25.

⁵ World Economic Forum, *The Global Risks Report 2025* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2025), 15-18; OECD, *Facts Not Fakes: Tackling Disinformation, Strengthening Information Integrity* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2024), 13-29.

⁶ Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 218-60.

⁷ Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 221-24; John Keane, *Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 165-87.

⁸ Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown, 2018), 7-22; Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2025: Indonesia* (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2025).

⁹ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2024: Indonesia* (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2024).

¹⁰ Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Mataram, *Kota Mataram Dalam Angka 2025* (Mataram: BPS Kota Mataram, 2025).

strategic role in the province's public life.¹¹ In such a city, the quality of democracy depends not only on formal institutions like the regional government, KPU, and Bawaslu, but also on whether civic actors can sustain informed participation, monitor power, and preserve the openness of public communication.¹²

The local setting also matters because contemporary democracy is increasingly mediated by digital infrastructures. Indonesia's digital profile is marked by extensive internet use and a very large social media population, which significantly expands the speed and scale of political communication.¹³ That environment has democratic advantages. It lowers barriers of expression, broadens access to information, and facilitates issue-based mobilization. Yet it also intensifies rumor circulation, fragmented publics, algorithmic amplification, and the normalization of shallow or manipulative political messaging.¹⁴ Global and Indonesian reports in recent years have placed misinformation and disinformation among the most significant risks to democratic trust and social cohesion.¹⁵ For local democracies such as Mataram, this means that democratic quality now depends partly on whether civil society can act as a mediator of information integrity.

The significance of the city scale should be underlined. A city is large enough to host differentiated publics, competing interests, and multiple institutions, yet compact enough for relations among state agencies, civic organizations, local media, campuses, and neighborhood communities to remain visible and politically consequential. Local democracy in a city therefore reveals the practical texture of democratic life more clearly than abstract national indicators. It is at the city scale that public trust is built or damaged through concrete experiences of administration, consultation, access, and responsiveness.¹⁶ Mataram is therefore an analytically fertile site for examining civil society capacity because the strengths and weaknesses of democratic life can be observed in close relation to institutions, communication networks, and everyday public issues.

A further reason to focus on Mataram lies in the institutional traces already visible in local electoral and oversight discourse. Local electoral bodies have emphasized participation, voter education, and public information as operational priorities, while local oversight institutions and civic discussions have repeatedly highlighted the danger of hoaxes, media independence, and youth involvement in participatory monitoring.¹⁷ These are not marginal themes. They indicate that democratic quality in Mataram is already being negotiated through questions of public literacy, communication ethics, and civic vigilance.

¹¹ Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, *Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat Dalam Angka 2025* (Mataram: BPS Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, 2025).

¹² Komisi Pemilihan Umum Kota Mataram, *Renstra KPU Kota Mataram 2020-2024* (Mataram: KPU Kota Mataram, 2024); Bawaslu Kota Mataram, "Refleksi dan Harapan: Bawaslu Kota Mataram Evaluasi Pengawasan Pilkada Partisipatif," December 7, 2024.

¹³ DataReportal, *Digital 2026: Indonesia* (2025).

¹⁴ UNESCO, *Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms: Safeguarding Freedom of Expression and Access to Information through a Multi-Stakeholder Approach* (Paris: UNESCO, 2023), 11-29.

¹⁵ World Economic Forum, *Global Risks Report 2025*, 15-18; OECD, *Facts Not Fakes*, 13-29.

¹⁶ OECD, *OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions 2024 Results* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2024), 21-29; United Nations Development Programme, *Public Sphere for Democratic Governance and Development* (New York: UNDP, 2024), 5-18.

¹⁷ Komisi Pemilihan Umum Kota Mataram, "Rapat Koordinasi dan Launching Indeks Partisipasi Pilkada Tahun 2024," October 18, 2025; Bawaslu Kota Mataram, "Isi Diskusi AJI Mataram, Bawaslu Komat Bedah Independensi Media dan Ancaman Hoax Pemilu," accessed April 18, 2026; Bawaslu Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, "Suhardi Ajak Mahasiswa Proaktif Awasi Pilkada NTB 2024," November 12, 2024.

This article therefore asks: How should the capacity of civil society in Mataram be understood in relation to democratic quality? Which dimensions of capacity matter most in this local democratic setting, and what are the main opportunities and constraints? The article does not claim to measure all local organizations empirically. Its objective is conceptual-exploratory: to construct an analytically grounded account of civil society capacity in Mataram through a dialogue between democratic theory, civil society scholarship, official local documents, and contemporary debates on information integrity.

The argument developed here is straightforward. Civil society capacity in Mataram can be understood through five connected dimensions. First, there is associative density, namely the presence of organizations, communities, and civic networks that allow citizens to organize interests and concerns. Second, there is civic mediation, the ability of those actors to translate social concerns into public claims. Third, there is participatory institutionalization, the degree to which civic engagement is connected to stable channels of public consultation, oversight, and policy communication. Fourth, there is information integrity, or the capacity to resist disinformation and preserve credible public discourse. Fifth, there is advocacy effectiveness, the capacity to transform civic concern into accountability, policy pressure, or corrective action. These dimensions make it possible to assess local democratic quality beyond the narrow question of turnout or formal legality.¹⁸

Methods

This study uses a qualitative, document-based research design. The method is appropriate because the article seeks to clarify the concept and dimensions of civil society capacity in a specific local democratic setting rather than to produce a statistical measurement of associational behavior.¹⁹ The analysis is interpretive and analytical. It combines theoretical sources on civil society, democracy, public sphere, participation, and associational life with official local documents and public reports relevant to Mataram and West Nusa Tenggara.

The source corpus consists of four groups of materials. The first group comprises canonical and contemporary works on civil society and democratic theory, including studies by Tocqueville, Gramsci, Habermas, Cohen and Arato, Putnam, Warren, Dryzek, Young, Diamond, Edwards, Tilly, and others.²⁰ These texts provide the conceptual vocabulary used to define the democratic significance of civil society. The second group consists of recent international reports on democracy, trust, disinformation, digital communication, and information integrity, including reports from the OECD, UNESCO, the World Economic Forum, Freedom House, and DataReportal.²¹ These sources situate the local discussion within broader structural changes affecting democracy.

¹⁸ Mark E. Warren, *Democracy and Association* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 61-88; Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 16-51.

¹⁹ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013), 44-45.

²⁰ See Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*; Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971); Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*.

²¹ OECD, *Facts Not Fakes*; OECD, *OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions 2024 Results* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2024); World Economic Forum, *Global Risks Report 2025*; Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2025: Indonesia*.

The third group consists of official local and provincial publications, especially Kota Mataram Dalam Angka 2025 and Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat Dalam Angka 2025, which provide a descriptive basis for understanding Mataram as an urban and administrative setting.²² The fourth group includes public documents and reports from KPU Kota Mataram and Bawaslu in Mataram and West Nusa Tenggara, especially those concerning electoral participation, public outreach, monitoring, and public warnings related to hoaxes and democratic integrity.²³

The analysis proceeds in three steps. First, the article reconstructs the main democratic functions of civil society in the literature. Second, it identifies the local dimensions in which those functions become relevant to Mataram. Third, it synthesizes the findings into a five-dimensional framework of civil society capacity. This framework is then used to assess the opportunities and constraints of democratic quality in Mataram.

This approach has limitations. Because the study relies on documentary and conceptual analysis, it does not claim to represent the full diversity of grassroots actors in Mataram, nor does it provide survey-based evidence of organizational performance. The article therefore advances a theoretically informed local reading rather than a definitive empirical census.²⁴ Even so, the approach remains valuable because local democratic quality is often discussed in thin procedural terms, while the civic infrastructures that sustain or weaken democracy remain underexamined.

Results and Discussion

1. Associative Density as the Material Base of Civil Society Capacity

Civil society cannot operate without organizational density. Democracy requires spaces where citizens associate around neighborhood interests, religion, education, labor, gender issues, youth activities, media work, professional concerns, and rights-based advocacy. Tocqueville already saw that associations prevent democratic citizens from becoming isolated individuals dependent only on the state.²⁵ Putnam later deepened this insight by linking associational life to social capital, trust, and institutional performance.²⁶ Warren, similarly, shows that associations contribute to democracy when they facilitate communication, representation, and cooperative problem-solving.²⁷

For Mataram, associative density should be understood in a specifically urban-local sense. As the provincial capital and a major administrative center, the city concentrates educational institutions, government offices, professional communities, religious organizations, media actors, student groups, and neighborhood-based social life.²⁸ This urban concentration creates a structural opportunity for civil society because democratic capacity grows where interaction is dense, public issues circulate quickly, and citizens are not politically dispersed into isolated pockets.

²² Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Mataram, *Kota Mataram Dalam Angka 2025*; Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, *Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat Dalam Angka 2025*.

²³ Komisi Pemilihan Umum Kota Mataram, *Renstra KPU Kota Mataram 2020-2024*; Komisi Pemilihan Umum Kota Mataram, “Rapat Koordinasi dan Launching Indeks Partisipasi Pilkada Tahun 2024”; Bawaslu Kota Mataram, “Isi Diskusi AJI Mataram, Bawaslu Komat Bedah Independensi Media dan Ancaman Hoax Pemilu.”

²⁴ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 47-48.

²⁵ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 489-92.

²⁶ Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 163-85.

²⁷ Warren, *Democracy and Association*, 61-88.

²⁸ Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Mataram, *Kota Mataram Dalam Angka 2025*.

Yet density alone is insufficient. Civil society can also be exclusionary, elitist, or captured by narrow interests.²⁹ Berman's reading of Weimar Germany and Chambers and Kopstein's discussion of "bad civil society" warn against romanticizing all associations as intrinsically democratic.³⁰ In local settings, associations may reinforce patronage, sectarian closure, or symbolic participation that never becomes public accountability. For that reason, the question in Mataram is not whether organizations exist, but whether the city's associational landscape generates democratic effects.

The available local public record suggests that Mataram does possess a meaningful civic infrastructure around electoral education, issue discussion, and participatory oversight. Public communications by KPU Kota Mataram and Bawaslu Kota Mataram show a recurring emphasis on outreach, voter education, collaboration with civic actors, and the socialization of democratic procedures.³¹ These initiatives matter because they signal the presence of institutional entry points through which civic actors can engage democratic processes. They also indicate that associational life in Mataram is not external to democracy; it is already being invited into electoral communication and oversight.

2. Civic Mediation and the Translation of Social Concerns into Public Claims

A second dimension of capacity lies in mediation. Civil society becomes politically significant when it translates dispersed social concerns into publicly recognizable claims. Cohen and Arato define civil society as a sphere of social interaction that includes associations, publics, and forms of communication situated between economy and state.³² Habermas locates its democratic significance in the formation of public opinion through communication, criticism, and publicity.³³ What matters, therefore, is the ability of organizations and networks to turn lived problems into publicly discussable issues.

In Mataram, this mediating role is crucial because local democratic quality depends heavily on whether ordinary citizens can move from private complaint to public articulation. Urban issues such as service access, education, women's participation, youth political literacy, social assistance, environmental conditions, and digital misinformation do not become democratic questions by themselves. They require mediators. Civil society organizations, campus-based groups, neighborhood forums, issue coalitions, journalists, professional bodies, and religious networks perform this mediating work when they frame concerns, build narratives, gather constituencies, and bring them into public discussion.³⁴

This is why civil society should not be reduced to service delivery or moral voluntarism. Its democratic function lies in articulation. Where articulation fails, democratic institutions tend to receive only elite-filtered inputs. In such conditions, elections may remain regular while democratic quality becomes hollow. Gramsci's broader insight is relevant here: civil society is one of the terrains

²⁹ Michael W. Foley and Bob Edwards, "The Paradox of Civil Society," *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 3 (1996): 38-52.

³⁰ Sheri Berman, "Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic," *World Politics* 49, no. 3 (1997): 401-29; Simone Chambers and Jeffrey Kopstein, "Bad Civil Society," *Political Theory* 29, no. 6 (2001): 837-65.

³¹ Komisi Pemilihan Umum Kota Mataram, *Renstra KPU Kota Mataram 2020-2024*; Bawaslu Kota Mataram, "Refleksi dan Harapan."

³² Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, ix-xxix.

³³ Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 57-88.

³⁴ John S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1-23; Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 34-51.

where social leadership and consent are organized.³⁵ Read in a democratic direction, this means that civic actors can either widen democratic discourse or allow hegemonic narratives to circulate uncontested.

The local concern with media independence and the threat of hoaxes in Mataram directly points to this mediating problem. Bawaslu Kota Mataram's public discussions with media and civic actors on hoax threats suggest that the struggle over democratic quality already includes the struggle over who defines credible public meaning.³⁶ When information integrity deteriorates, mediation is captured by rumor, outrage, or manipulation. Civil society capacity, then, includes the ability to defend the public conditions under which claims can still be judged, contested, and revised.

3. Participatory Institutionalization and the Durability of Democratic Engagement

A third dimension is participatory institutionalization. Civil society is democratically stronger when participation is not only spontaneous but connected to stable channels of consultation, monitoring, and accountability. Tilly's work on democracy shows that democratic deepening requires durable relations between citizens and public authority, not merely intermittent mobilization.³⁷ Dahl also reminds us that democracy depends on continuing opportunities for participation, contestation, and enlightened understanding.³⁸

For local democracy, this means that civic capacity grows when institutions make room for structured engagement. Public hearings, participatory planning forums, issue consultations, election monitoring partnerships, civic education programs, and transparent complaint channels can help transform episodic participation into democratic routine. The importance of this point is practical. Many local civic environments display energetic mobilization during elections or crises, yet fall back into silence once the moment passes. In such a setting, civil society remains reactive rather than institutionally consequential.

Mataram presents both opportunity and limitation. The opportunity lies in the fact that local electoral institutions already treat participation and public information as operational concerns.³⁹ Bawaslu's emphasis on participatory monitoring and youth involvement also indicates that parts of the oversight system recognize citizens as democratic co-producers rather than passive recipients.⁴⁰ This opens a pathway toward institutionalized civic engagement.

The limitation lies in the fragility of continuity. Local democratic participation in many Indonesian settings still depends on event-based activation: campaign periods, election cycles, immediate controversies, or donor-supported initiatives. Once the event ends, civic networks often lose resources, visibility, or leverage. Foley and Edwards call attention to this wider paradox of civil society: associations may be plentiful, yet politically weak if they are not connected to effective structures of public accountability.⁴¹

³⁵ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 12-13, 238-39.

³⁶ Bawaslu Kota Mataram, "Isi Diskusi AJI Mataram, Bawaslu Komat Bedah Independensi Media dan Ancaman Hoax Pemilu."

³⁷ Tilly, *Democracy*, 13-25.

³⁸ Dahl, *On Democracy*, 37-43.

³⁹ Komisi Pemilihan Umum Kota Mataram, "Rapat Koordinasi dan Launching Indeks Partisipasi Pilkada Tahun 2024."

⁴⁰ Bawaslu Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, "Suhardi Ajak Mahasiswa Proaktif Awasi Pilkada NTB 2024"; Bawaslu Kota Mataram, "Refleksi dan Harapan."

⁴¹ Foley and Edwards, "Paradox of Civil Society," 38-52.

For Mataram, participatory institutionalization therefore becomes a diagnostic question: do civic actors have stable access to deliberation and oversight, or are they activated only when institutions temporarily invite them? The answer matters because democratic quality cannot be built on mobilization alone. It requires routine channels through which citizens and civic organizations can exert voice between elections, not only during them.

4. Information Integrity as a New Democratic Capacity of Civil Society

A fourth dimension of capacity concerns information integrity. In the digital era, civil society is no longer tasked only with organization and advocacy. It is also compelled to defend the epistemic conditions of democracy. OECD work on disinformation argues that false and misleading information undermines trust, weakens policy implementation, and damages democratic institutions.⁴² UNESCO's guidelines on digital platforms similarly stress that information governance now requires a multistakeholder approach involving states, platforms, civil society, media, and academia.⁴³ The World Economic Forum has repeatedly ranked misinformation and disinformation among the most severe short-term global risks because they corrode trust and intensify polarization.⁴⁴

This global condition is directly relevant to Indonesia. Freedom House reports note the persistence of online harassment, criminalization, and disinformation in the Indonesian digital environment, especially around electoral periods.⁴⁵ DataReportal's recent profile of Indonesia confirms the massive scale of internet and social media penetration, which means that political communication now moves through platforms at a depth impossible to ignore.⁴⁶ In this environment, local democratic quality becomes partly dependent on whether communities can distinguish credible information from manipulative content.

For Mataram, the issue is concrete rather than abstract. Public warnings and discussions issued by local oversight bodies about hoax threats and participatory vigilance indicate that digital misinformation is already recognized as a local democratic problem.⁴⁷ The significance of this recognition is profound. It means that civil society capacity must now include media literacy, fact-checking cooperation, journalist networks, campus engagement, youth education, and public communication ethics.

This dimension also changes how civil society itself should be evaluated. An organization may be active, visible, and vocal, yet still weaken democracy if it amplifies unverified claims or polarizing narratives. Civil society capacity therefore has an epistemic side: the ability to preserve credibility, verify claims, promote responsible media practices, and maintain a public sphere that remains open without becoming informationally chaotic.⁴⁸ Dewan Pers's long-standing cyber media

⁴² OECD, *Facts Not Fakes*, 13-29.

⁴³ UNESCO, *Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms*, 11-29.

⁴⁴ World Economic Forum, *Global Risks Report 2025*, 15-18.

⁴⁵ Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2025: Indonesia*.

⁴⁶ DataReportal, *Digital 2026: Indonesia*.

⁴⁷ Bawaslu Kota Mataram, "Isi Diskusi AJI Mataram, Bawaslu Komat Bedah Independensi Media dan Ancaman Hoax Pemilu"; Bawaslu Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, "Suhardi Ajak Mahasiswa Proaktif Awasi Pilkada NTB 2024."

⁴⁸ OECD, *OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions 2024 Results* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2024), 21-29.

guidelines remain relevant here because they frame online publication within standards of verification, correction, and accountability.⁴⁹

5. Advocacy Effectiveness and the Problem of Democratic Consequence

A fifth and decisive dimension is advocacy effectiveness. Civil society matters democratically when it can alter public agendas, pressure institutions, or protect public interests. Edwards argues that civil society should be understood simultaneously as associational life, the good society, and the public sphere; without links among these dimensions, civic action remains normatively appealing but politically thin.⁵⁰ Diamond likewise stresses that democratic consolidation depends on organizations capable of checking state power, representing interests, recruiting leaders, and enlarging participation.⁵¹

Advocacy effectiveness is especially important at the local level because proximity can be both a democratic advantage and a constraint. Proximity allows civic actors in a city like Mataram to identify issues quickly, build cross-sector networks, and communicate with public officials more directly than in national politics. Yet proximity also intensifies patronage, social pressure, informal hierarchy, and elite brokerage. The result is a familiar ambiguity: civil society may have access to officials without possessing genuine bargaining power. It may be heard symbolically without influencing decisions materially.

This is where democratic quality becomes visible. If civic advocacy in Mataram can only produce ceremonial consultation, democracy remains procedurally intact but substantively thin. If, however, civic actors can shape discussions on participation, disinformation, inclusion, transparency, and public services, then civil society becomes a real democratic force. Young's work on inclusion is relevant because democratic legitimacy depends on whether institutions can hear diverse social positions rather than only formally equal but socially filtered voices.⁵²

Available local indicators suggest that the advocacy potential is present, though uneven. Public engagement around political dialogue, youth participation, women's participation, and electoral monitoring indicates that institutional channels are not closed.⁵³ Yet the documentary record also suggests that civic energy is often tied to electoral or programmatic moments. The democratic challenge is therefore to convert episodic visibility into durable leverage.

6. A Five-Dimensional Framework of Civil Society Capacity in Mataram

The discussion so far allows a synthetic conclusion. Civil society capacity in Mataram can be framed through five interconnected dimensions:

- a. Associative density: the existence of diverse organizations and networks that enable citizens to gather, communicate, and cooperate.
- b. Civic mediation: the ability to transform lived concerns into public issues and democratic claims.

⁴⁹ Dewan Pers, *Pedoman Pemberitaan Media Siber* (Jakarta: Dewan Pers, 2012).

⁵⁰ Edwards, *Civil Society*, 1-17.

⁵¹ Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 218-60.

⁵² Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 52-80.

⁵³ Komisi Pemilihan Umum Kota Mataram, "Rapat Koordinasi dan Launching Indeks Partisipasi Pilkada Tahun 2024"; Bawaslu Kota Mataram, "Refleksi dan Harapan"; Bawaslu Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, "Suhardi Ajak Mahasiswa Proaktif Awasi Pilkada NTB 2024."

- c. Participatory institutionalization: the existence of stable pathways through which civic actors engage consultation, oversight, and accountability.
- d. Information integrity: the ability to resist disinformation and protect credible public communication.
- e. Advocacy effectiveness: the capacity to influence agendas, correct institutions, and defend public interests.

These dimensions should not be treated separately. Associative density without mediation produces inward-looking organizations. Mediation without institutionalization yields noise without consequence. Institutionalization without information integrity produces formally participatory but manipulable democracy. Information integrity without advocacy leaves truth politically weak. Advocacy without associative depth becomes elite brokerage instead of civil society.

In Mataram, the city's democratic potential lies in the relative concentration of institutions, civic actors, media channels, and educational environments. The city possesses structural conditions favorable to civic life. Yet those conditions do not automatically generate democratic quality. They require organizational continuity, communicative credibility, and institutional pathways that allow public concerns to move from society into accountable decision-making.

This reading also suggests that civil society in Mataram should not be approached merely as a sector of NGOs. The relevant field is wider. It includes campus organizations, youth forums, religious associations, neighborhood structures, journalist networks, women's groups, electoral observers, professional communities, and issue-based coalitions. Democratic quality grows when these actors cooperate across differences and build a public sphere that is argumentative, informed, and socially anchored.⁵⁴

Conclusion

This article has argued that the democratic significance of civil society in Mataram lies in its capacity to sustain the social and communicative conditions under which democracy remains meaningful beyond elections. Mataram is a strategic local setting because it combines the features of an urban administrative center, a relatively dense civic environment, and an increasingly digital public sphere. These features create democratic opportunities, yet they also intensify the pressures of information disorder, episodic participation, and unequal civic influence.

The main analytical contribution of the article is a five-dimensional framework of civil society capacity: associative density, civic mediation, participatory institutionalization, information integrity, and advocacy effectiveness. Through this framework, democratic quality can be assessed in more substantive terms than electoral procedure alone. The analysis suggests that civil society in Mataram has genuine democratic potential, especially in voter education, participatory oversight, public communication, and issue articulation. At the same time, this potential remains uneven because much civic action still depends on temporary mobilization and has not always matured into durable institutional leverage.

The practical implication is clear. Strengthening democracy in Mataram requires more than fair electoral administration. It requires strengthening the civic infrastructures that connect citizens

⁵⁴ Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, ix-xxix; Warren, *Democracy and Association*, 89-128.

to public authority, widening access to participatory forums, protecting credible media environments, and building collaborative mechanisms against disinformation. The future quality of local democracy in Mataram will depend on whether civil society can remain organized, credible, inclusive, and consequential in the everyday life of the city.

A further implication concerns strategy. Civil society capacity will become more durable when local democratic work is not concentrated only in electoral seasons. Universities, schools, community organizations, women's groups, youth organizations, professional associations, religious bodies, local journalists, and neighborhood forums need to be connected through continuing civic platforms rather than ad hoc encounters. Such platforms are important because they stabilize democratic learning, multiply channels of verification, and reduce dependence on elite mediation.⁵⁵ In a city like Mataram, democratic quality will advance where civic collaboration becomes routine: where information is checked collectively, policy issues are discussed before conflict escalates, and advocacy is pursued through organized public reasoning rather than reactive outrage.

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