

# CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE IN DEMOCRATIC LIFE IN CENTRAL LOMBOK REGENCY

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## Abstract

*This article examines the relation between civil society and the public sphere in democratic life in Central Lombok Regency. The analysis starts from the proposition that democracy requires institutional procedures, electoral competition, and an arena in which citizens can formulate concerns, test arguments, contest authorities, and transform private grievances into public claims. Civil society matters in this process because it creates the organizational carriers of communication, solidarity, advocacy, and social trust. The article uses a qualitative, document-based approach drawing on democratic theory, studies of civil society and the public sphere, Indonesian regulatory frameworks, and official regional materials relevant to Central Lombok. The findings show that the public sphere in Central Lombok is best understood as a hybrid field shaped by village institutions, religious and associational networks, local issue publics, electoral outreach mechanisms, digital communication, and development controversies linked to tourism, infrastructure, and public services. In this setting, civil society performs five interrelated democratic functions: translating lived concerns into public issues; expanding access to participation beyond formal elections; moderating social fragmentation through associational mediation; scrutinizing public authority; and sustaining a local communicative infrastructure that connects citizens, community leaders, and institutions. The article argues that democratic life in Central Lombok depends less on the mere availability of participation channels than on the capacity of civil society to keep the public sphere open, plural, and socially anchored.*

**Keywords:** *civil society, public sphere, democratic life, local democracy, Central Lombok, Indonesia*

## Introduction

Civil society occupies a central position in democratic thought because democracy requires more than periodic voting. Democratic life needs citizens who speak, assemble, deliberate, organize, criticize, and pursue collective purposes in public.<sup>1</sup> Elections confer authority, yet authority becomes democratically meaningful only when public communication remains open enough for citizens to formulate judgments about power, policy, and justice.<sup>2</sup> For that reason, the relation between civil society and the public sphere remains one of the decisive questions of democratic theory.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 489-92; Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 89-91.

<sup>2</sup> Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 218-20.



The public sphere can be understood as the communicative domain in which social experiences are translated into publicly discussable claims.<sup>3</sup> In that domain, people do not appear merely as administrative subjects or private individuals. They enter public life as interlocutors, claim-makers, critics, and members of associations capable of giving form to common concerns.<sup>4</sup> Civil society matters because citizens rarely enter public debate as isolated individuals. They act through organizations, religious communities, neighborhood forums, women's groups, farmer networks, youth associations, professional bodies, issue coalitions, and media communities that provide language, solidarity, leadership, and channels of representation.<sup>5</sup>

This theoretical problem becomes more urgent when democracy is observed at the local level. Local democracy is the scale at which public life becomes concrete. Citizens encounter the state through permits, roads, schools, health facilities, village governance, welfare programs, policing, market regulation, and development decisions that shape daily existence.<sup>6</sup> Local politics also reveals whether democracy functions as a living communicative order or merely as a formal structure. When citizens lack durable associations and accessible arenas of discussion, democratic procedures may continue to exist while public life becomes thin, fragmented, or easily captured.<sup>7</sup>

Indonesia provides an especially important setting for examining this relation. Since the democratic transition after 1998, the country has expanded local autonomy, competitive elections, decentralized planning mechanisms, and opportunities for citizen participation.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, Indonesian democracy faces persistent pressures generated by oligarchic influence, unequal communicative resources, disinformation, clientelism, and uneven associational capacity across regions.<sup>9</sup> These pressures are not distributed evenly. They acquire distinct forms in each locality depending on social composition, economic change, institutional density, religious authority, and media ecology.

Central Lombok Regency is analytically significant within this national context. The regency combines agrarian communities, expanding tourism corridors, village-based associational life, religious networks, youth mobilities, and development pressures tied to strategic infrastructure and regional transformation.<sup>10</sup> Official regional planning documents describe the regency as undergoing structural change associated with economic diversification, service expansion, and governance reform.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, statistical publications portray a socially diverse district whose

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<sup>3</sup> 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), 27-30.

<sup>4</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 52-56.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Edwards, *Civil Society*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 3-8; John Keane, *Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 6-11.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Tilly, *Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 13-18.

<sup>7</sup> Mark E. Warren, *Democracy and Association* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 61-67.

<sup>8</sup> Indonesia, *Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages*; Indonesia, *Law No. 14 of 2008 on Public Information Openness*.

<sup>9</sup> Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 221-22; Michael W. Foley and Bob Edwards, "The Paradox of Civil Society," *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 3 (1996): 38-52.

<sup>10</sup> Pemerintah Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, *Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Daerah Kabupaten Lombok Tengah Tahun 2021-2026* (Praya: Pemerintah Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, 2021), 1.4-1.9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.1-4.12.

democratic life is shaped by both rural sociality and growing connectivity.<sup>12</sup> This combination makes Central Lombok an illuminating site for reflecting on how civil society and the public sphere interact under conditions of transition rather than settled institutional equilibrium.

The local significance of the question is reinforced by the form taken by participation in contemporary Indonesian democracy. Participation does not move only through electoral events. It also appears in village deliberations, issue advocacy, religious gatherings, educational forums, online discussion, neighborhood complaint channels, social movements, and practical forms of public bargaining around development and welfare.<sup>13</sup> The public sphere has therefore become hybrid. Face-to-face discussion remains important, but digital communication increasingly amplifies, accelerates, and sometimes distorts local discourse.<sup>14</sup> Civil society must now operate across these overlapping terrains.

Central Lombok also presents a useful case because local democratic life is mediated by institutions explicitly concerned with public participation. Electoral authorities, for example, have promoted social participation through localized democratic outreach, including the designation of democracy pioneer villages in the 2024 election cycle.<sup>15</sup> These initiatives indicate that democratic vitality depends on public communication and civic mediation, not solely on procedural administration. Yet formal outreach succeeds only when a broader civil society ecology exists to receive, interpret, and circulate democratic norms.

This article therefore asks: how should the relation between civil society and the public sphere in democratic life be understood in Central Lombok Regency? The argument developed here is that civil society in Central Lombok functions as the social infrastructure of the local public sphere. Its democratic significance lies in five capacities: articulating social experience into public issues, widening access to discussion, connecting fragmented publics, monitoring authority, and preserving communicative spaces in which citizens can appear as political subjects. Democratic quality in this setting depends on the density and openness of these mediating functions.

## Methods

This study uses a qualitative, document-based research design. The method is appropriate because the article seeks to interpret the democratic relation between civil society and the public sphere rather than to measure a single variable through survey techniques.<sup>16</sup> The analysis is conceptual and contextual at once. It reconstructs the normative functions of civil society and the

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<sup>12</sup> Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, *Kabupaten Lombok Tengah Dalam Angka 2025* (Praya: BPS Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, 2025), xv-xxi.

<sup>13</sup> Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 492-98.

<sup>14</sup> DataReportal, *Digital 2026: Indonesia* (2025); Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2025: Indonesia* (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2025).

<sup>15</sup> Komisi Pemilihan Umum Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, *Keputusan Komisi Pemilihan Umum Kabupaten Lombok Tengah Nomor 676 Tahun 2024 tentang Penetapan Lokasi Pelaksanaan Program Pelopor Desa Demokrasi pada Pemilihan Gubernur dan Wakil Gubernur Nusa Tenggara Barat dan Bupati dan Wakil Bupati Lombok Tengah Tahun 2024* (Praya: KPU Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, 2024).

<sup>16</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013), 44-47.

public sphere from major democratic theorists and then relates those functions to official documents, public materials, and regional conditions relevant to Central Lombok Regency.

The source corpus consists of five groups of materials. The first group includes canonical and contemporary works on civil society, democracy, association, and the public sphere, especially writings by Alexis de Tocqueville, Antonio Gramsci, Jürgen Habermas, Nancy Fraser, Iris Marion Young, John S. Dryzek, Michael Edwards, John Keane, Robert D. Putnam, Mark E. Warren, and Charles Tilly.<sup>17</sup> These works provide the analytical vocabulary for understanding associations, communicative arenas, representation, democratic inclusion, and the tensions between social power and public reason.

The second group consists of studies on democratic quality, digital communication, disinformation, and public trust. These materials are used because contemporary public spheres are no longer reducible to face-to-face deliberation or classical print culture. They are shaped by digital infrastructures, platform logics, and uneven information environments that affect local democratic life.<sup>18</sup>

The third group includes Indonesian legal and policy materials related to participation, public information, and democratic governance, including legislation on public information openness, village governance, and electoral participation, as well as regulatory guidance issued by state institutions.<sup>19</sup> These documents help locate the local case within the broader institutional architecture of Indonesian democracy.

The fourth group consists of official local and regional materials relevant to Central Lombok Regency, including Kabupaten Lombok Tengah Dalam Angka 2025, regional development planning documents, and public institutional records relating to electoral participation initiatives.<sup>20</sup> These sources are used to identify the social and institutional setting in which local public communication takes place.

The fifth group includes selected public reports by international organizations that address trust, digital platforms, freedom of information, and democratic governance.<sup>21</sup> These are employed

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<sup>17</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 489-92; Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 12-13; Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 27-30; Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 123-27.

<sup>18</sup> OECD, *Facts Not Fakes: Tackling Disinformation, Strengthening Information Integrity* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2024), 15-21; UNESCO, *Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms: Safeguarding Freedom of Expression and Access to Information through a Multi-Stakeholder Approach* (Paris: UNESCO, 2023), 10-14.

<sup>19</sup> Indonesia, *Law No. 14 of 2008 on Public Information Openness*; Komisi Pemilihan Umum Republik Indonesia, *Peraturan Komisi Pemilihan Umum Nomor 9 Tahun 2022 tentang Partisipasi Masyarakat dalam Penyelenggaraan Pemilihan Gubernur dan Wakil Gubernur, Bupati dan Wakil Bupati, serta Walikota dan Wakil Walikota* (Jakarta: KPU RI, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, *Kabupaten Lombok Tengah Dalam Angka 2025*; Pemerintah Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, *RPJMD 2021-2026*.

<sup>21</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *Public Sphere for Democratic Governance and Development* (New York: UNDP, 2024), 11-15; OECD, *OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions 2024 Results* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2024), 5-9.

not to import external templates mechanically, but to sharpen the diagnosis of how communicative integrity and associational mediation matter in contemporary democracies.

The analysis proceeds in three steps. First, the article reconstructs the theoretical relation between civil society and the public sphere. Second, it identifies the principal features of Central Lombok's local setting that shape democratic communication. Third, it interprets how civil society may be understood as a mediating infrastructure of public life within that local context. Because the study is document-based, it does not claim to capture every empirical variation among actors and organizations in the regency. Its contribution lies in building a conceptually rigorous, context-sensitive interpretation that can guide further field research.

## Results and Discussion

Democratic life in Central Lombok can be understood as a layered communicative order. Formal institutions provide part of this order, but they do not exhaust it. The public sphere is generated through a wider field of social relations in which citizens, groups, and authorities encounter one another through discussion, claims, conflicts, and negotiated expectations.<sup>22</sup> In such a field, civil society acts as the carrier of communication between experience and institution.

A first result concerns the social basis of public articulation. In democratic theory, the public sphere becomes meaningful only when social experiences acquire a public language.<sup>23</sup> Everyday problems such as access to services, land use, village budgeting, employment opportunities, youth aspirations, women's representation, environmental pressure, and the consequences of tourism-led development do not become democratic issues automatically. They become public when they are voiced, framed, circulated, and made discussable. Civil society plays this role because associations organize attention. They gather dispersed grievances, convert them into shareable concerns, and allow citizens to speak in a register stronger than private complaint.<sup>24</sup>

This function is particularly important in a regency such as Central Lombok, where social life is dispersed across villages, subdistricts, growth areas, and differentiated economic sectors. BPS publications show a territorially broad population with varied livelihood conditions and development pressures.<sup>25</sup> In such a context, public life cannot rely on a single metropolitan media center or on spontaneous individual expression alone. It needs mediating organizations that connect local experiences to broader audiences. Religious associations, village forums, youth groups, women's organizations, farmer networks, tourism-related community bodies, educational institutions, and issue-based civic initiatives all contribute to this communicative translation, even when they do so unevenly.

A second result concerns the public sphere as an infrastructure of inclusion. Habermas's classical formulation remains important because it identifies publicity as a condition through which

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<sup>22</sup> John S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1-6.

<sup>23</sup> Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 123-27.

<sup>24</sup> Neera Chandhoke, *State and Civil Society: Explorations in Political Theory* (New Delhi: Sage, 1995), 243-49.

<sup>25</sup> Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, *Kabupaten Lombok Tengah Dalam Angka 2025*, 3-18.

authority can be submitted to critical reason.<sup>26</sup> Yet later democratic theory has shown that actually existing public spheres are always marked by inequality, exclusion, and competition among publics.<sup>27</sup> This insight is highly relevant to Central Lombok. Public communication in a socially differentiated regency does not unfold in one unified arena. It moves through overlapping spaces with different levels of access, voice, and visibility. Village meetings, community consultations, religious gatherings, educational forums, electoral socialization activities, and digital messaging groups each enable participation for some actors while limiting others.

Civil society matters here because it widens practical access to public life. Associations reduce the distance between citizens and institutions. They provide places where people can learn how to speak publicly, develop confidence, acquire information, and test claims before entering more formal arenas.<sup>28</sup> In local democratic settings, this preparatory function is decisive. Many citizens first encounter participation not through abstract constitutional principles but through concrete associational experiences: a parent committee, a village forum, a women's cooperative, a mosque-based discussion, a farmer group, a campus organization, or a community network formed around a local issue. These spaces cultivate what can be called democratic usability: the practical ability to enter common affairs.

In Central Lombok, this question of usability is significant because public participation depends on bridging differences of education, geography, age, gender, and digital access. Regional planning materials repeatedly emphasize human development, service delivery, and governance responsiveness as developmental priorities.<sup>29</sup> Such priorities imply that democratic inclusion remains inseparable from social infrastructure. Civil society contributes by making participation socially legible. It explains policy in familiar language, brokers institutional procedures, and helps citizens interpret what is politically at stake. Without this mediating labor, formal participation rights remain unevenly usable.

A third result concerns the relation between civil society and public pluralism. Democratic public life is never composed of perfectly harmonious interests. It is formed through contestation among values, identities, needs, and interpretations of the common good.<sup>30</sup> Central Lombok, like many localities undergoing economic and social transition, is shaped by multiple publics: village communities concerned with infrastructure and welfare; youth publics oriented toward mobility and digital expression; religious publics structured by moral authority; development publics concerned with tourism, employment, investment, and land; and electoral publics mobilized through campaigns and local leadership networks. A democratic public sphere does not abolish these differences. It provides a grammar through which they can become visible and contestable.

Civil society gives institutional form to this pluralism. It prevents public life from collapsing into a direct binary between isolated individuals and state authority. Associations create intermediate spaces in which citizens can gather, refine, and defend positions before confronting

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<sup>26</sup> Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 36-43.

<sup>27</sup> Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 49-55; Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 124-29.

<sup>28</sup> Warren, *Democracy and Association*, 72-78.

<sup>29</sup> Pemerintah Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, *RPJMD 2021-2026*, 5.1-5.23.

<sup>30</sup> Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*, 2-5.

the state or the market.<sup>31</sup> This is especially important where rapid development can intensify asymmetries of information and power. Large-scale projects, strategic infrastructure, and tourism-centered growth frequently produce public questions about consultation, compensation, livelihood transitions, environmental sustainability, cultural authority, and distributive justice.<sup>32</sup> In such moments, civil society does not function merely as a moral ornament. It helps produce the public sphere as a field of accountable visibility.

A fourth result concerns scrutiny and democratic restraint. Civil society contributes to democracy by generating forms of watchfulness that electoral institutions alone cannot sustain.<sup>33</sup> Local democratic life requires organizations and publics capable of asking whether decisions are transparent, whether procedures are fair, whether policies are socially intelligible, and whether authorities are responsive to criticism. The public sphere matters here because accountability is not produced only by legal sanctions. It is also produced by exposure, debate, reputational pressure, and the possibility that contested actions will be brought before wider publics.

The Central Lombok case offers clues to this function. Electoral regulations and local initiatives on public participation indicate awareness that democratic administration requires societal involvement.<sup>34</sup> The designation of democracy pioneer villages in the 2024 local electoral context is noteworthy because it recognizes participation as a social process that must be cultivated territorially.<sup>35</sup> Such programs matter less as symbolic events than as indications that democratic institutions depend on societal co-production. Civil society extends this principle beyond elections by maintaining continuous circuits of public attention. It enables criticism to persist between electoral cycles.

A fifth result concerns the changing form of the public sphere under digital conditions. Local democratic life now unfolds across hybrid communicative environments.<sup>36</sup> Face-to-face interaction remains decisive in village and community settings, but digital platforms have become central to the circulation of claims, images, rumors, endorsements, grievances, and political narratives.<sup>37</sup> This transformation creates new opportunities for civil society while also introducing new vulnerabilities. Digital media can amplify voices that were previously marginal. They can speed up issue formation, facilitate coordination, and widen access to information. Yet they can also fragment attention, reward sensation, weaken verification, and intensify polarization.<sup>38</sup>

For Central Lombok, the practical implication is that the public sphere no longer resides in a single place. It stretches across village halls, religious forums, schools, WhatsApp groups, local media, campaign events, bureaucratic outreach, and issue-centered digital networks. Civil society must therefore perform a dual task. It must preserve embodied forums of discussion while also

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<sup>31</sup> Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, 531-33.

<sup>32</sup> Pemerintah Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, *RPJMD 2021-2026*, 3.18-3.39.

<sup>33</sup> Tilly, *Democracy*, 14-23; Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 233-36.

<sup>34</sup> Komisi Pemilihan Umum Republik Indonesia, *Peraturan Komisi Pemilihan Umum Nomor 9 Tahun 2022*.

<sup>35</sup> Komisi Pemilihan Umum Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, *Keputusan ... Nomor 676 Tahun 2024*.

<sup>36</sup> UNDP, *Public Sphere for Democratic Governance and Development*, 14-19.

<sup>37</sup> DataReportal, *Digital 2026: Indonesia*; Dewan Pers, *Pedoman Pemberitaan Media Siber* (Jakarta: Dewan Pers, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> OECD, *Facts Not Fakes*, 22-31; Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2025: Indonesia*.

cultivating informational discipline in digital communication. The democratic question is not whether local publics will become digital; that shift has already occurred. The question concerns whether associational actors can provide enough ethical and communicative structure to prevent digital publicity from degrading into noise, intimidation, or unchecked disinformation.<sup>39</sup>

This point leads to a sixth result: civil society functions as a translator between institutional language and lived social worlds. Democratic institutions often speak in technical vocabularies of planning, budgeting, compliance, indicators, and procedural requirements. Citizens experience politics through concrete burdens and hopes: transport costs, school quality, prices, irrigation, employment, social protection, land pressure, or unequal access to opportunities. The public sphere becomes democratic when these two languages meet without one erasing the other.<sup>40</sup> Civil society performs this translation. It brings institutional issues down to the level of lived significance and raises lived significance into publicly discussable claims.

In Central Lombok this translational role is especially important because developmental transformation creates a widening gap between strategic planning discourse and everyday social experience. Regional development documents speak of growth, competitiveness, governance reform, and service improvement.<sup>41</sup> These are important goals, yet citizens encounter them through concrete local effects that differ by place and class. Associations, forums, and issue publics make those differences visible. They keep democratic life anchored in social reality rather than allowing policy language to float above it.

A seventh result concerns the normative quality of the local public sphere. Democratic life does not require unanimity, yet it does require standards of mutual visibility, argumentative intelligibility, and nonviolent contestation.<sup>42</sup> Civil society contributes to these standards by cultivating habits of listening, organizing, and collective self-limitation. It is in associations that citizens learn how to disagree without exiting public life altogether. This associational pedagogy is indispensable in local settings where social relations are dense and repeated. A damaged local public sphere has consequences that extend beyond opinion; it reshapes trust, cooperation, and the practical possibility of common action.

The relation between civil society and the public sphere in Central Lombok can therefore be summarized through five interconnected capacities. First, civil society articulates social experience into public issues. Second, it widens access to participation by making democratic action usable. Third, it connects plural publics without suppressing difference. Fourth, it scrutinizes authority through public visibility and critique. Fifth, it stabilizes the hybrid communicative environment in which contemporary democratic life unfolds. These capacities do not eliminate inequality or domination. They create the social conditions under which such problems can be named, contested, and politically processed.

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<sup>39</sup> UNESCO, *Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms*, 18-24; World Economic Forum, *The Global Risks Report 2025* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2025), 28-34.

<sup>40</sup> UNDP, *Public Sphere for Democratic Governance and Development*, 21-27.

<sup>41</sup> Pemerintah Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, *RPJMD 2021-2026*, 6.1-6.18.

<sup>42</sup> Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 23-28.

The discussion also reveals a limitation that should be stated clearly. Civil society is not automatically democratic. Associations may reproduce hierarchy, exclusion, patronage, or narrow interests.<sup>43</sup> The public sphere itself may be distorted by unequal access, strategic manipulation, and symbolic domination.<sup>44</sup> The significance of civil society in Central Lombok therefore lies not in romantic assumptions about community, but in the practical question of whether organizations and publics can sustain openness, criticism, inclusion, and communicative integrity. That is the standard by which democratic relevance should be judged.

## Conclusion

The relation between civil society and the public sphere in democratic life in Central Lombok Regency is best understood as a relation of mediation. Democracy does not persist through electoral procedures alone. It requires a communicative field in which citizens can convert social experience into public claims, encounter one another across difference, scrutinize authority, and participate in the interpretation of common affairs. Civil society provides the organizational basis of that field.

The analysis has shown that the public sphere in Central Lombok is hybrid, territorial, and socially layered. It is formed through village institutions, associational networks, religious and educational forums, issue publics, digital communication, and formal participation mechanisms. In that environment, civil society performs the democratic work of articulation, inclusion, linkage, scrutiny, and translation. These functions are especially important in a regency shaped by developmental transition, uneven communicative resources, and expanding digital mediation.

The main implication of the article is that strengthening local democracy in Central Lombok requires more than improving institutional procedure. It requires sustaining the social infrastructures through which citizens become publicly present to one another and to power. Future research can extend this argument through fieldwork on specific organizations, village-level forums, women's groups, youth networks, religious associations, and digital issue publics. Such work would deepen understanding of how democratic life is actually composed from below. The broader conclusion remains clear: civil society keeps the public sphere socially alive, and the vitality of that sphere remains indispensable to democratic life.

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<sup>43</sup> Foley and Edwards, "The Paradox of Civil Society," 47-49; Edwards, *Civil Society*, 95-103.

<sup>44</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 12-13; Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 124-29.

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