THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN CONTROLLING DIGITAL DISINFORMATION IN EAST LOMBOK REGENCY

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Abstract

Digital disinformation has become one of the most disruptive conditions of contemporary democracy because it unsettles trust, distorts public judgment, and weakens the normative basis of participation. In local settings, the danger is not only the circulation of false information but also the gradual normalization of communicative disorder in everyday civic life. This article examines the role of civil society in controlling digital disinformation in East Lombok Regency. It asks how civil society can function as a mediating force between citizens, digital platforms, and democratic institutions, and what kinds of capacities are required for such a role to become effective. The study employs a qualitative design based on literature review and document analysis. The sources include civil society theory, democratic theory, public-sphere scholarship, research on disinformation, Indonesian policy documents on digital literacy, reports of election-monitoring institutions, and statistical publications relevant to East Lombok. The findings show that the role of civil society in controlling digital disinformation depends on at least four intertwined capacities: civic literacy, social mediation, participatory monitoring, and public advocacy. In East Lombok, these capacities are structurally relevant because the regency combines a large population, expanding digital connectivity, active associational life, and a political environment in which information moves quickly through social media, messaging applications, religious networks, youth communities, and neighborhood-level informal communication. The article argues that civil society is most effective when it does not merely react to isolated hoaxes but helps institutionalize habits of verification, ethical communication, and collaborative public responsibility. The contribution of the article lies in repositioning civil society as a democratic infrastructure of epistemic care at the local level.

Keywords: *Civil Society; Digital Disinformation; Local Democracy; Public Sphere; East Lombok Regency*

Introduction

The contemporary democratic order is increasingly shaped by the struggle over information credibility. The growth of digital platforms has widened the circulation of opinion, accelerated participation, and diversified access to public communication. Yet the same process has also intensified the production and spread of digital disinformation. Information now moves through networks whose speed often exceeds the pace of verification, reflection, and institutional response.[1] In such a condition, democracy confronts a problem deeper than technical misinformation. It confronts a disturbance in the very ecology of public judgment.

[1] Andrew Chadwick, *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 3–15.

Disinformation is not simply false content. It is a political and social process through which narratives, images, edited clips, rumors, and emotionally charged claims are circulated with the effect, and often the intention, of shaping perceptions outside disciplined procedures of evidence.[2] The democratic danger of disinformation lies in its cumulative impact. Repeated exposure to misleading claims erodes confidence in institutions, fragments public reasoning, and turns suspicion into a normal civic mood.[3] Citizens remain formally free to speak, but the quality of their shared informational environment deteriorates.

This condition places civil society in a strategic position. Classical and contemporary scholarship has long understood civil society as the associational domain that mediates between private life and formal political institutions.[4] It carries educative, deliberative, and watchdog functions. In democratic life, civil society helps organize participation, articulate interests, cultivate norms of cooperation, and protect the public realm from domination.[5] When the central democratic problem shifts toward digital disinformation, the mission of civil society also changes in emphasis. It must not only mobilize participation; it must strengthen the epistemic conditions that make participation meaningful.

The issue becomes particularly urgent in local democratic settings. Much of the global debate on disinformation concentrates on national elections, large-scale platforms, or international information warfare.[6] Those discussions are important, but they can obscure the fact that digital disinformation is lived most concretely in local communities. At the regency and municipal level, misleading information travels through dense ties of kinship, neighborhood communication, friendship circles, religious gatherings, youth groups, partisan networks, and WhatsApp-based micro-publics. It is often trusted because it is received through familiar social channels rather than anonymous media sources.[7] In local settings, the correction of false information therefore depends as much on social trust and community mediation as on platform moderation.

East Lombok Regency provides a meaningful locus for such reflection. It is one of the largest population centers in West Nusa Tenggara, and its social life is sustained by a strong associational landscape that includes religious organizations, youth groups, village forums, educational institutions, election-related civic actors, women's networks, and issue-based community initiatives.[8] At the same time, East Lombok is situated within the broader Indonesian digital

[2] Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2017), 20–22.

[3] W. Lance Bennett and Steven Livingston, "The Disinformation Order: Disruptive Communication and the Decline of Democratic Institutions," *European Journal of Communication* 33, no. 2 (2018): 122–24.

[4] Andrew Arato and Jean L. Cohen, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), ix–xiii.

[5] Larry Diamond, "Rethinking Civil Society: Toward Democratic Consolidation," *Journal of Democracy* 5, no. 3 (1994): 4–6; Mark E. Warren, *Democracy and Association* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 1–8.

[6] Philip N. Howard, *Lie Machines: How to Save Democracy from Troll Armies, Deceitful Robots, Junk News Operations, and Political Operatives* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), 1–7.

[7] Cass R. Sunstein, *Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 3–18.

[8] Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Lombok Timur, *Kabupaten Lombok Timur dalam Angka 2025* (Selong: BPS Kabupaten Lombok Timur, 2025); Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Lombok Timur, *Statistik Kesejahteraan Rakyat Kabupaten Lombok Timur 2024* (Selong: BPS Kabupaten Lombok Timur, 2024).

transformation, in which internet-enabled communication has become increasingly embedded in everyday public life.[9] This combination makes East Lombok a valuable case for thinking about how civil society can respond to disinformation in a setting where social density and digital circulation intersect.

The relevance of the issue is sharpened by Indonesian evidence. Bawaslu has repeatedly emphasized the vulnerability of electoral communication on social media to hate speech, hoaxes, and other forms of manipulative content.[10] Mafindo's mapping of the information disorder surrounding the 2024 electoral cycle also shows that political hoaxes remain highly significant in Indonesia's communication landscape.[11] In parallel, national digital-literacy initiatives have acknowledged that digital transformation requires not only infrastructure but civic competence, ethical awareness, and critical skills.[12] These developments indicate that disinformation should be analyzed as a democratic capacity problem rather than merely a technical media problem.

This article therefore asks two related questions. First, what role can civil society play in controlling digital disinformation in East Lombok Regency? Second, what capacities must civil society cultivate so that its interventions move beyond incidental correction and become part of democratic institutionalization? The argument developed here is that civil society can function as a democratic infrastructure of epistemic care when it operates through four interrelated capacities: civic literacy, social mediation, participatory monitoring, and public advocacy. Through these capacities, civil society helps form a local information order in which citizens are encouraged to verify, deliberate, and act with greater responsibility.

The article proceeds in IMRAD format. After outlining the qualitative research design, it presents the analytical findings in four interrelated discussions: the local context of disinformation in East Lombok, the literacy function of civil society, the mediating and monitoring role of civic organizations, and the advocacy dimension of institutional response. The conclusion emphasizes that controlling disinformation in local democracy requires durable civic infrastructures rather than episodic campaigns.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach based on literature review and document analysis. The method is appropriate because the article does not seek to measure the frequency of disinformation statistically or to test causal effects through survey instruments. Its aim is analytical: to interpret how civil society can be understood as a democratic actor in controlling digital disinformation at

[9] Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika Republik Indonesia, *Road Map Literasi Digital 2020–2024* (Jakarta: Kementerian Kominfo, 2020), 11–18.

[10] Badan Pengawas Pemilihan Umum, "Luncurkan Kerawanan Kampanye di Medsos, Tingkat Provinsi Didominasi Ujaran Kebencian," October 31, 2023.

[11] Mafindo, *Lanskap Hoaks 2024 Semester 1* (Jakarta: Mafindo, 2024), 3–7; Mafindo, "Siaran Pers Mafindo: Hoaks Politik Meningkat Tajam Jelang Pemilu 2024, Ganggu Demokrasi Indonesia," February 2, 2024.

[12] Data Komdigi, "Literasi Digital Indonesia," accessed April 18, 2026; Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika Republik Indonesia, *Road Map Literasi Digital 2020–2024*, 19–26.

the local level.[13] The methodological orientation follows qualitative inquiry that prioritizes meaning, context, institutional relations, and interpretive synthesis.

The sources of data are grouped into four categories. The first category consists of theoretical works on civil society, democracy, the public sphere, participation, and communicative life. These works provide the conceptual foundation for understanding why civic associations matter in democratic orders and how public communication acquires institutional significance.[14] The second category includes scholarship on digital disinformation, media manipulation, platform politics, and information disorder. These sources help specify the mechanisms through which false or misleading content circulates and affects public life.[15] The third category comprises Indonesian policy and institutional documents, especially publications related to digital literacy, election vulnerability, media ethics, and anti-hoax initiatives.[16] The fourth category includes statistical and public-information sources relevant to East Lombok Regency and West Nusa Tenggara in order to situate the discussion within a concrete local setting.[17]

The analysis was conducted through three stages. First, the sources were read to identify recurring concepts related to civil-society capacity, democratic quality, platform-mediated communication, local participation, and disinformation control. Second, these concepts were organized into an analytical matrix that linked forms of civil-society action with the specific democratic problems generated by digital disinformation. Third, the matrix was interpreted in relation to East Lombok Regency as a local locus, with particular attention to the regency's demographic significance, associational density, and the importance of community mediation in shaping public communication.[18]

The study does not claim exhaustive empirical coverage of every civic organization in East Lombok. Its contribution lies in conceptual clarification and context-sensitive synthesis. By combining democratic theory, civil-society scholarship, and locally relevant public documents, the article produces an interpretive account of how civil society can function as a mechanism of disinformation control. Such an account is useful for local democratic reflection because many

[13] Michael Edwards, *Civil Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 1–10.

[14] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 27–56; John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1954), 126–43.

[15] Jana Laura Egelhofer and Sophie Lecheler, "Fake News as a Two-Dimensional Phenomenon: A Framework and Research Agenda," *Annals of the International Communication Association* 43, no. 2 (2019): 99–103; Deen Freelon and Chris Wells, "Disinformation as Political Communication," *Political Communication* 37, no. 2 (2020): 145–48.

[16] Bawaslu NTB, "Hadiri Joint Analysis Polda NTB, Umar Sampaikan Sejumlah Potensi Kerawanan Pilkada di Media," November 19, 2024; Bawaslu Kota Mataram, "Isi Diskusi AJI Mataram, Bawaslu Komat Bedah Independensi Media dan Ancaman Hoax Pemilu," accessed April 18, 2026.

[17] Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Lombok Timur, "Penduduk, Laju Pertumbuhan Penduduk, Distribusi Persentase Penduduk, Kepadatan Penduduk, Rasio Jenis Kelamin Penduduk Menurut Kecamatan di Kabupaten Lombok Timur, 2024," accessed April 18, 2026; Portal Kabupaten Lombok Timur, "Cegah Paham Intoleran dan Ekstrem," December 14, 2025.

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

practical interventions fail precisely when they are not grounded in a coherent understanding of the civic capacities that must support them.[19]

Results and Discussion

1. East Lombok Regency as a Local Democratic Information Environment

Any discussion of civil society in controlling disinformation must begin with the character of the local communication environment. East Lombok is not merely an administrative territory; it is a dense social formation in which public judgment emerges through overlapping institutions of everyday life. BPS publications show East Lombok as a major population center in West Nusa Tenggara, and its scale alone matters for communication politics because larger population networks tend to produce more varied channels for opinion circulation, rumor transmission, and political messaging.[20] Population size does not automatically generate disinformation, but it intensifies the need for mediating institutions capable of preserving informational trust.

The local communication environment in East Lombok is shaped by several interacting layers. The first layer is digital and platform-based. Citizens increasingly rely on smartphones, messaging applications, short-video platforms, and social media feeds for news, commentary, and interpersonal exchange.[21] The second layer is communal. Information is interpreted within family circles, village relations, prayer groups, educational settings, and informal community conversations. The third layer is institutional. Elections, government programs, school activities, religious preaching, and civic campaigns each generate their own messages and channels. Disinformation becomes powerful when these layers intersect: content appears on a platform, is endorsed by a familiar actor, and is then repeated within a trusted local setting.

The notion of information disorder is useful here. Wardle and Derakhshan distinguish among misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation in order to show that the problem is broader than accidental error.[22] In local democratic settings, the most destructive effect often comes from repeated circulation rather than sophisticated fabrication. A misleading caption, an old photograph reused in a new context, an unverified accusation against a public figure, or a sensational claim about electoral fraud can quickly become socially persuasive because it matches preexisting anxieties. Digital disinformation succeeds when it aligns with emotional readiness and social trust.

This helps explain why local democracy is especially vulnerable. Deliberation at the local level often depends on reputational proximity. Citizens know one another, encounter one another, and interpret politics through lived familiarity. That intimacy can support trust, but it can also make correction difficult. Correcting a false message is not simply a technical act of fact-checking; it may be received as criticism of a respected community member, a religious sympathizer, a family elder,

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

[20] Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Lombok Timur, *Kabupaten Lombok Timur dalam Angka 2025*.

[21] Data Komdigi, "Literasi Digital Indonesia"; Bruce Bimber, *Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1–12.

[22] Wardle and Derakhshan, *Information Disorder*, 20–27.

or a politically influential intermediary. Disinformation control in East Lombok therefore requires social sensitivity as much as informational competence.[23]

The Indonesian electoral context has deepened the urgency of this problem. Bawaslu's analysis of social-media vulnerability has shown how digital spaces during electoral periods become susceptible to hate speech, hoax circulation, and manipulative narratives.[24] Mafindo's documentation of political hoaxes around the 2024 electoral cycle confirms that election-related disinformation remains a persistent feature of Indonesian public life.[25] Even when specific rumors do not originate in East Lombok, they can be localized rapidly through adapted narratives, district-level partisan talk, and group-based forwarding practices.

In this setting, civil society becomes necessary because the state alone cannot govern the local information order. Government agencies may issue clarifications, election bodies may publish official information, and platforms may remove some harmful content. Yet none of these measures can fully reach the intimate circuits through which communities interpret and transmit information. Civil society occupies the domain in which social relations, public education, moral authority, and citizen initiative converge. Its function is therefore neither secondary nor auxiliary. It is constitutive of democratic resilience.

2. Civil Society as a Literacy Infrastructure

The first major finding of this study is that civil society controls digital disinformation most effectively when it acts as a literacy infrastructure. This means more than organizing occasional campaigns on the dangers of hoaxes. Literacy, in this context, refers to the formation of durable civic habits through which citizens learn to question sources, compare claims, identify manipulation, and understand the ethical consequences of forwarding unverified content.[26]

The significance of literacy has been widely recognized in Indonesian digital-governance discourse. The national digital-literacy framework developed under Kominfo and continued within Komdigi emphasizes four pillars: digital skills, digital ethics, digital culture, and digital safety.[27] These pillars are important because they expand literacy beyond technical use. A citizen may know how to operate an application and still remain vulnerable to disinformation if ethical reflexes and critical judgment are weak. Civil society is well placed to translate such a framework into local civic practice because it possesses relational access to communities that formal state campaigns often reach only superficially.

In East Lombok, literacy-oriented civil-society work can take several forms. Religious organizations can incorporate verification ethics into sermons, study circles, and youth mentoring. Schools and campus communities can organize fact-checking workshops and discussion forums on

[23] Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris, and Hal Roberts, *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 4–11.

[24] Badan Pengawas Pemilihan Umum, "Luncurkan Kerawanan Kampanye di Medsos."

[25] Mafindo, *Lanskap Hoaks 2024 Semester 1*, 8–16.

[26] UNESCO, *Media and Information Literate Citizens: Think Critically, Click Wisely!* (Paris: UNESCO, 2021), 9–15.

[27] Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika Republik Indonesia, *Road Map Literasi Digital 2020–2024*, 21–37.

responsible digital communication. Village-based associations can turn local meetings into spaces for discussing common misleading claims. Women's groups, which often play a central role in family-level information mediation, can become important sites for everyday literacy diffusion. Youth communities can develop peer-based campaigns that are more persuasive than top-down warnings.[28]

Such initiatives matter because literacy is never only individual. Dewey's understanding of democracy as a mode of associated living is instructive here.[29] Judgment matures through communication, shared inquiry, and public learning. A democratic society cannot rely solely on isolated individuals to defend truth under conditions of accelerated platform communication. It must build environments in which reflective judgment becomes socially supported. Civil society, at its best, provides that support.

The literature on participatory culture and networked publics further clarifies why literacy must be socialized. Digital platforms reward speed, emotional intensity, and visibility.[30] They incentivize reaction rather than reflection. Tufekci and Chadwick each show, in different ways, that digital communication has transformed the organizational conditions of public action.[31] Citizens can mobilize quickly, but rapid circulation also reduces the time available for verification. Civil-society literacy practices therefore serve as counter-temporal institutions. They slow down communicative impulsivity and reintroduce deliberative discipline.

This educational role also has a normative dimension. When civil society addresses digital disinformation, it is not merely helping citizens avoid factual errors. It is cultivating an ethic of communicative responsibility. Arendt's reflections on the public world remind us that politics depends on a shared world of appearance in which words and deeds acquire common significance.[32] When that world is saturated with manipulation, the possibility of acting together is weakened. Literacy thus becomes a democratic virtue because it protects the conditions under which common judgment remains possible.

A literacy-centered view of civil society has practical implications for East Lombok. Civic interventions should not be limited to reactive debunking. They should develop repeated pedagogical forms: community modules, local-language guides, school partnerships, mosque-based discussion circles, youth ambassador programs, and collaborative verification routines around public issues such as elections, public health, social assistance, and disaster-related information. Through repetition, literacy becomes institutionalized in daily life. When that happens, civil society no longer appears only when a hoax explodes; it continuously shapes the civic culture that makes hoaxes less persuasive.

3. Civil Society as Social Mediator and Participatory Monitor

[28] Portal Kabupaten Lombok Timur, "Cegah Paham Intoleran dan Ekstrem."

[29] Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 154–84.

[30] Nick Couldry, *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 1–14.

[31] Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 5–21; Chadwick, *The Hybrid Media System*, 25–44.

[32] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 50–58.

The second major finding is that civil society functions as a mediator between formal institutions and everyday publics. This mediating role is crucial because disinformation often flourishes where institutional communication is distrusted, delayed, inaccessible, or socially distant.[33] Citizens do not automatically trust corrections issued by official actors, especially when public polarization has already weakened confidence in authorities. Civil society can bridge that gap by translating institutional information into socially credible forms.

Mediation operates at several levels. At the communicative level, civil-society organizations can clarify public information in accessible language. At the relational level, they can deliver corrections through familiar and trusted intermediaries. At the political level, they can reduce antagonistic escalation by framing verification as a civic obligation rather than a partisan maneuver. In East Lombok, this may involve cooperation among teachers, religious leaders, youth organizers, election volunteers, journalists, and village actors who can interpret contentious claims before they become socially entrenched.[34]

This mediating role is strengthened when paired with participatory monitoring. Democratic theory has long associated civil society with watchdog functions.[35] In the digital era, that function extends to the monitoring of information flows. Participatory monitoring includes reporting harmful content, documenting recurring misleading narratives, identifying moments of heightened vulnerability, and coordinating with election bodies, local media, and fact-checking communities. It is a form of civic vigilance.

Participatory monitoring is particularly important in electoral moments. Election seasons intensify affective polarization and create incentives for rumor-driven communication. Bawaslu has repeatedly promoted participatory oversight as a key element of election integrity, and this orientation is relevant not only to conventional campaign violations but also to the digital circulation of manipulative claims.[36] In East Lombok, civil society can contribute by helping citizens identify deceptive campaign materials, impersonation tactics, manipulated images, and unverified accusations that seek to delegitimize candidates, institutions, or voting processes.

The role of local media should also be included in this mediating-monitoring architecture. Although platform-centered communication is powerful, journalism remains an important democratic institution of verification.[37] Civil society and local media need not be understood as separate spheres. Their cooperation can expand the reach of corrective information and normalize standards of evidence. Community radio, online local portals, campus media, and civic discussion forums can together form a local verification ecosystem.

[33] Helen Margetts, *Rethinking Democracy with AI* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2024), 88–96.

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

[35] John Keane, *The Life and Death of Democracy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009), 688–708.

[36] Bawaslu NTB, "Hadiri Joint Analysis Polda NTB, Umar Sampaikan Sejumlah Potensi Kerawanan Pilkada di Media"; Badan Pengawas Pemilihan Umum, "Luncurkan Kerawanan Kampanye di Medsos."

[37] Joan Donovan, *Meme Wars: The Untold Story of the Online Battles Upending Democracy in America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2022), 179–98.

There is also a deeper sociological point. Putnam's account of civic life underscores that democratic effectiveness depends on networks of trust and reciprocity.[38] Under digital disinformation, trust can be exploited, but it can also be mobilized for correction. The task of civil society is to convert social trust from a channel of rumor transmission into a resource for democratic filtering. That conversion does not occur automatically. It requires organization, coordination, and continuity. A village leader, teacher, student organization, women's association, or mosque youth group becomes democratically significant when it serves as a node that checks circulation rather than merely amplifying it.

This finding suggests that civil-society capacity in East Lombok should be understood institutionally. The issue is not whether isolated individuals can identify false information. The issue is whether the regency's associational life can sustain distributed monitoring networks that prevent misleading content from hardening into collective belief. Where such networks exist, disinformation meets friction. Where they do not, even weak rumors can gain social legitimacy.

4. Civil Society as Advocate of Public-Interest Information Order

The third major finding is that civil society must also act at the level of advocacy. Literacy and mediation are essential, but they are insufficient if the broader informational order remains structurally permissive toward manipulation. Civil society therefore has to intervene not only in community education but also in the public regulation of communication norms, institutional accountability, and democratic rights.[39]

Advocacy in this context should be understood broadly. It includes pushing public institutions to communicate transparently and promptly; encouraging schools, campuses, and community centers to adopt digital-ethics programs; supporting local media professionalism; demanding responsible platform governance; and defending citizens from both manipulation and excessive control. The goal is not censorship. The goal is a public-interest information order in which freedom of expression coexists with responsibilities of verification, accountability, and non-harm.[40]

This balance matters because responses to disinformation can become illiberal when they rely only on punitive or centralized mechanisms. Democratic theory requires care here. A society can combat false information while preserving civic freedom only if corrective measures remain anchored in public reasoning and shared oversight.[41] Civil society is indispensable precisely because it can pressure institutions from outside while also cooperating with them in practical problem-solving. It preserves the plural character of democratic oversight.

For East Lombok, advocacy means translating abstract concerns into local public agendas. Civil-society actors can press for stronger communication protocols during elections and public emergencies. They can encourage village governments and district agencies to disseminate

[38] Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 167–76.
[39] Michael Edwards, *Civil Society*, 91–100.
[40] Deen Freelon and Chris Wells, "Disinformation as Political Communication," *Political Communication* 37, no. 2 (2020): 149–52.
[41] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 235–50.

information in timely and comprehensible forms. They can build local coalitions among schools, religious institutions, youth groups, women's associations, journalists, and election observers. They can also advocate for the inclusion of digital ethics and verification skills in civic education spaces. Such interventions do not depend on extraordinary resources. They depend on organizational clarity and continuity.

Advocacy also reshapes the meaning of civil society itself. Cohen and Arato describe civil society as a sphere of social interaction that can both resist domination and expand democratic communication.[42] In the age of digital disinformation, this definition acquires a new dimension. Civil society becomes the social power that defends the truth conditions of democracy. It does not monopolize truth. It protects the procedures, norms, and shared habits through which truth claims can be publicly examined.

This is why the article proposes the phrase epistemic care. The phrase refers to a civic disposition in which communities treat the circulation of information as a matter of shared democratic responsibility. Epistemic care is present when citizens hesitate before forwarding incendiary claims, when organizations organize verification rather than sensation, and when civic leaders understand that communicative integrity is part of public service. Such care is especially important in local democracies, where reputational damage, communal tension, and political distrust can spread quickly through familiar networks.

The advocacy role of civil society is thus not an optional supplement. It is the point at which local democratic resilience becomes institutionalized. Literacy educates citizens, mediation translates information, monitoring detects threats, and advocacy links all three to the structures that sustain public life. Without advocacy, civil-society responses remain episodic. With advocacy, they become part of a local democratic order capable of enduring beyond moments of crisis.

Conclusion

This article has examined the role of civil society in controlling digital disinformation in East Lombok Regency through a qualitative analysis of theoretical, institutional, and context-relevant public sources. The central argument is that civil society is most effective when it functions as a democratic infrastructure of epistemic care. Its significance lies in four interrelated capacities: civic literacy, social mediation, participatory monitoring, and public advocacy.

The discussion has shown that digital disinformation in local democracy cannot be addressed solely through platform moderation or official clarification. In East Lombok, public communication moves through dense social ties in which trust, familiarity, religious association, educational experience, and communal authority each shape the reception of information. Because of this, disinformation control is inseparable from the social organization of civic life. Civil society matters because it inhabits the very spaces in which public judgment is formed.

A civil-society approach also broadens the meaning of democratic defense. The problem is not only to refute individual falsehoods. The deeper task is to preserve the communicative conditions under which citizens can deliberate, disagree, and participate without surrendering

[42] Arato and Cohen, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, 472–91.

public life to manipulation. When civil society institutionalizes habits of verification, ethical communication, and collaborative vigilance, it contributes directly to democratic quality.

For East Lombok Regency, the practical implication is clear. Local democratic resilience requires sustained cooperation among civic associations, educational institutions, religious organizations, journalists, youth groups, women's networks, and public bodies. Such cooperation should be organized not as an emergency reaction to isolated hoaxes but as a long-term civic project. The future of local democracy depends not only on how people vote, but also on how they learn to judge, verify, and communicate together.

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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 Lavalle, "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.

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[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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CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN WEST LOMBOK REGENCY

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Abstract
This article examines how civil society contributes to the institutionalization of citizen participation in West Lombok Regency. The analysis begins from a familiar democratic problem. Citizen participation often appears during elections, protests, or ad hoc consultations, yet it does not always become a durable part of ordinary governance. The democratic question therefore concerns not participation in the abstract but the extent to which participation acquires stable channels, procedural repetition, inclusive access, and public consequence.[1] Using a qualitative, document-based design, the article draws on democratic theory, Indonesian local governance literature, official planning documents, public statistics, and local electoral oversight materials. The argument developed here is that citizen participation in West Lombok becomes institutionally meaningful when civil society is able to perform five interconnected functions: carrying associational life, mediating social concerns into public claims, securing repeated access to participatory forums, widening inclusion across social groups, and translating participation into policy or oversight consequence.[2] West Lombok offers an instructive case because it combines rural and peri-urban social worlds, dense village life, local planning mechanisms, and electoral oversight initiatives that together reveal both the promise and fragility of democratic institutionalization. The article concludes that the future of participatory democracy in West Lombok depends less on the episodic mobilization of citizens than on the consolidation of civic routines that make participation regular, legible, and consequential.
Keywords: *civil society, citizen participation, local democracy, participatory institutionalization, West Lombok, Indonesia*

Introduction

Civil society matters to democracy because democracy does not live by elections alone. Democratic life requires organized spaces in which citizens assemble, discuss problems, formulate claims, and sustain engagement beyond the electoral moment.[3] Participation in this sense is neither a decorative supplement to representative government nor a purely moral expression of communal

[1] Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 22-44; Sherry R. Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35, no. 4 (1969): 216-224.

[2] Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 472-563; Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, eds., *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance* (London: Verso, 2003), 3-30.

[3] Robert A. Dahl, *On Democracy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 37-61; Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 218-260.

goodwill. It is a constitutive democratic practice through which citizens test institutions, articulate needs, and shape the public direction of collective life.[4]

This theoretical point becomes especially important when participation is viewed from the local level. In many democracies, citizen involvement remains intense but uneven. Public enthusiasm can be visible during campaigns, crises, or contentious events, yet ordinary governance often reverts to administrative closure, elite brokerage, or symbolic consultation. Under such conditions, participation exists, but it does not become institutionalized. It lacks continuity, reliable procedures, and durable channels through which citizens can repeatedly affect public decisions.[5]

The concept of institutionalization helps clarify the problem. Participation becomes institutionally meaningful when it is sustained by rules, organizations, recurring forums, and expectations of responsiveness. It becomes part of governance rather than a temporary interruption of governance.[6] This is precisely where civil society assumes democratic significance. Civil society provides the associations, networks, civic habits, communicative forums, and watchdog capacities through which participation can move from sporadic expression to public routine.[7]

The Indonesian case is particularly important because democratization after 1998 expanded space for local participation while also exposing its uneven depth. Decentralization created opportunities for local deliberation, consultation, and civic engagement, yet the quality of participation has often depended on local social organization, institutional openness, and the ability of citizens to convert voice into consequence.[8] In such a context, the question is not whether participation exists. The question is whether participation is organized, repeated, inclusive, and effective enough to acquire democratic durability.

West Lombok Regency is an important setting for examining this issue. The regency combines agrarian, coastal, peri-urban, and tourism-linked zones; it contains ten districts; and it is shaped by strong village sociality, community organizations, religious networks, and local planning procedures.[9] Official regional planning documents repeatedly place public participation within the architecture of development planning, consultation, and governance, while public statistics underscore the scale and complexity of the regency as a social and administrative arena.[10] At the

[4] Benjamin R. Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 117-163.

[5] Pippa Norris, *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 97-134; Jonathan Fox, "Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say?" *World Development* 72 (2015): 346-361.

[6] Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 58-102.

[7] Michael Edwards, *Civil Society*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 34-57; Mark E. Warren, *Democracy and Association* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 61-90.

[8] Michael Buehler, "Decentralisation and Local Democracy in Indonesia: The Marginalisation of the Public Sphere," in *Problems of Democratisation in Indonesia: Elections, Institutions and Society*, ed. Edward Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner (Singapore: ISEAS, 2010), 267-285.

[9] Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Lombok Barat, *Kabupaten Lombok Barat Dalam Angka 2026* (Gerung: BPS Kabupaten Lombok Barat, 2026).

[10] PPID Kabupaten Lombok Barat, *Dokumen Penetapan RPD Lombok Barat Tahun 2025-2026* (Gerung: Pemerintah Kabupaten Lombok Barat, 2025); Kabupaten Lombok Barat, *Peraturan Daerah Kabupaten Lombok Barat*

same time, electoral oversight initiatives in West Lombok and across Nusa Tenggara Barat indicate ongoing efforts to widen participatory vigilance among citizens, including vulnerable groups and community organizations.[11]

These conditions make West Lombok analytically useful. It is neither an abstract democratic ideal nor a purely metropolitan case. It is a local polity where citizen participation can be observed in village deliberation, development planning, public consultation, electoral monitoring, and community advocacy. The local scale allows the democratic texture of participation to appear more clearly. It becomes possible to ask whether citizens merely attend forums or whether participation acquires institutional thickness.

This article therefore asks: how should the role of civil society in the institutionalization of citizen participation in West Lombok Regency be understood? The article argues that civil society institutionalizes participation when it performs five connected functions: first, it sustains associational carriers through which citizens gather and coordinate; second, it mediates lived concerns into public language; third, it secures repeated access to participatory arenas; fourth, it broadens representation so that participation does not narrow into elite voice; and fifth, it helps produce oversight, policy feedback, and democratic consequence.[12]

Methods

This study uses a qualitative, document-based research design. The method is appropriate because the article seeks to interpret the institutional logic of citizen participation rather than measure individual attitudes statistically.[13] The central object of analysis is not a single organization or event but a wider civic and institutional field in which participation becomes recurrent, organized, and publicly consequential.

The source corpus consists of five groups of materials. The first group includes canonical and contemporary works on civil society, democracy, participation, deliberation, and institutional design. These works provide the analytical vocabulary for understanding the relation between civic organization and participatory durability.[14] The second group includes literature on Indonesia's democratic and local governance context, especially studies on decentralization, democratic consolidation, and the local conditions under which participation becomes politically meaningful.[15]

Nomor 4 Tahun 2025 tentang Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Panjang Daerah Kabupaten Lombok Barat Tahun 2025-2045 (Gerung: Pemerintah Kabupaten Lombok Barat, 2025).

[11] Bawaslu Kabupaten Lombok Barat, "Bawaslu Lombok Barat Gelar Fasilitasi Penguatan Pemahaman Kepemiluan bagi Penyandang," December 5, 2025; Bawaslu Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, "Merangkul Kelompok Rentan, Bawaslu NTB Teguhkan Pengawasan Partisipatif," March 7, 2026.

[12] Archon Fung, "Recipes for Public Spheres: Eight Institutional Design Choices and Their Consequences," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 11, no. 3 (2003): 338-367.

[13] John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013), 69-110.

[14] Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, 472-563; John S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1-54; Warren, *Democracy and Association*, 1-20.

[15] Buehler, "Decentralisation and Local Democracy in Indonesia," 267-285.

The third group consists of official regional documents and public statistics relevant to West Lombok and Nusa Tenggara Barat. These include Kabupaten Lombok Barat Dalam Angka 2026, Statistik Daerah Kabupaten Lombok Barat 2025, Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat Dalam Angka 2026, regional planning documents, and public planning files that refer to community participation, development consultation, and administrative priorities.[16] The fourth group includes public materials from election oversight bodies, particularly Bawaslu initiatives concerning participatory oversight, civic education, and the engagement of social groups in democratic monitoring.[17] The fifth group includes local government information on village and district planning forums, including musrenbang-related materials that point to the procedural places where participation may be reproduced.[18]

The analysis proceeds in three steps. First, the article reconstructs the theoretical meaning of participatory institutionalization from democratic literature. Second, it reads West Lombok's public documents as evidence of participatory architecture: the formal sites, policy language, and administrative routines through which citizens are expected to engage. Third, it interprets the democratic role of civil society in relation to these institutional opportunities and constraints.[19]

This approach has limitations. Because the study does not rely on interviews or survey data, it does not claim to measure the subjective motivations of citizens or the micro-dynamics of every participatory forum. The aim is analytical reconstruction rather than exhaustive field representation. Yet this limitation does not weaken the article's central purpose. Institutionalization is partly visible in the formal and documentary traces of public life: in recurring forums, policy language, oversight mechanisms, public statistics, and civic infrastructures that indicate whether participation has a durable place in governance.[20]

Results and Discussion

From Episodic Voice to Institutionalized Participation

Citizen participation becomes democratically important when it moves beyond occasional expression. Pateman's early democratic argument remains crucial here: participation forms citizens even as it influences institutions.[21] Yet participation cannot generate durable democratic effects when it remains isolated, one-off, or merely symbolic. Arnstein's classic ladder still helps identify

[16] Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Lombok Barat, *Kabupaten Lombok Barat Dalam Angka 2026*; Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Lombok Barat, *Statistik Daerah Kabupaten Lombok Barat 2025* (Gerung: BPS Kabupaten Lombok Barat, 2025); Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, *Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat Dalam Angka 2026* (Mataram: BPS Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, 2026).

[17] Bawaslu Kabupaten Lombok Barat, "Bawaslu Lombok Barat Gelar Fasilitasi Penguatan Pemahaman Kepemiluan bagi Penyandang"; Bawaslu Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, "Bawaslu NTB dan Kemenag NTB Teken MoU, Perkuat Pengawasan Partisipatif Pemilu," September 2, 2025.

[18] Narmada Kabupaten Lombok Barat, "Musrembangdes Desa Senggigi Bahas dan Tetapkan RKPDes 2026 serta DU RKPDes 2027," November 17, 2025; Narmada Kabupaten Lombok Barat, "Sosialisasi Kamus Usulan Permasalahan Tahun 2027 Digelar di Kecamatan Batulayar," January 7, 2026.

[19] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 69-110.

[20] Fox, "Social Accountability," 346-361.

[21] Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 22-44.

this distinction. Participation that only informs or placates citizens differs fundamentally from participation that redistributes influence and creates public leverage.[22]

For this reason, institutionalization should be treated as the core democratic problem. Participation is institutionally stronger when it is repeated through stable procedures, recognized by public authorities, supported by organizations, and linked to outcomes that citizens can observe.[23] This does not mean that all participation must be formalized into bureaucracy. Civil society often thrives on flexibility, initiative, and informal trust. Yet without recurring access points, civic energy becomes fragile. Democratic engagement then depends too heavily on extraordinary moments rather than ordinary institutions.[24]

West Lombok is a useful case for this distinction because its participatory reality is already structured by recurring public mechanisms. Development planning in Indonesia is widely organized through musrenbang and related consultation channels, and Lombok Barat's current planning documents continue to frame community participation as a governance priority.[25] Public planning files for 2026 explicitly refer to increasing community participation in village development planning forums and public consultations, while local planning discourse also highlights problem-mapping and participatory agenda formation across districts.[26] These documentary signals matter because they show that citizen participation is not imagined only as spontaneous civic expression. It is already embedded in procedural expectations.

Still, formal recognition alone does not guarantee democratic substance. Participatory forums can become routinized without becoming influential. They can also be captured by local notables, reduced to administrative ritual, or used to ratify pre-formed agendas.[27] The role of civil society becomes decisive at this point. Civil society supplies the civic pressure that transforms a forum from a procedural container into a living democratic mechanism. Participation becomes real when citizens arrive with organization, knowledge, claims, and the expectation that public institutions must respond.[28]

Associational Carriers and the Social Infrastructure of Participation

Civil society institutionalizes participation first by carrying it socially. Participation does not emerge from isolated individuals alone. It depends on associations, neighborhood ties, religious circles, women's groups, farmer groups, youth networks, professional communities, issue-based

[22] Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," 216-224.

[23] Fung and Wright, *Deepening Democracy*, 15-29; Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*, 90-102.

[24] Edwards, *Civil Society*, 91-110.

[25] PPID Kabupaten Lombok Barat, *Dokumen Penetapan RPD Lombok Barat Tahun 2025-2026*; Kabupaten Lombok Barat, *Peraturan Daerah Kabupaten Lombok Barat Nomor 4 Tahun 2025 tentang Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Panjang Daerah Kabupaten Lombok Barat Tahun 2025-2045*.

[26] PPID Kabupaten Lombok Barat, *Dokumen Rancangan Awal Rencana Kerja 2026* (Gerung: Pemerintah Kabupaten Lombok Barat, 2026); Narmada Kabupaten Lombok Barat, "Sosialisasi Kamus Usulan Permasalahan Tahun 2027 Digelar di Kecamatan Batulayar."

[27] Sherry R. Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," 216-224; Brian Wampler, *Participatory Budgeting in Brazil: Contestation, Cooperation, and Accountability* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 23-49.

[28] Warren, *Democracy and Association*, 61-90.

organizations, and other collective forms through which citizens learn cooperation and public speech.[29] Putnam's account of civic traditions remains useful because it shows that institutional performance is related to dense horizontal relations and civic habits.[30] At the same time, later critics correctly warn that civil society is not automatically democratic. Associations can exclude, dominate, or reproduce inequality.[31] For that reason, associative density should be treated as a democratic resource whose quality must be examined rather than celebrated abstractly.

In West Lombok, the social basis for participation is substantial. The regency's scale, district diversity, and village-based social organization provide a broad arena for associational life.[32] Public statistics and regional descriptions indicate a socially differentiated territory that includes agricultural communities, growing service sectors, tourism-linked areas, and dense village settlements.[33] Such a setting creates multiple sites in which participation can be socially carried before it enters formal governance channels.

This carrying function is crucial. Citizens rarely enter public forums as detached individuals. They enter as members of circles of trust, obligation, or organized concern. Civil society converts diffuse everyday problems into collective awareness. A damaged road, school access, irrigation difficulty, environmental stress, or procedural unfairness acquires public form when social actors gather around it.[34] Without this pre-institutional work, participatory forums tend to privilege already articulate actors or administratively favored groups.

West Lombok's participatory potential therefore lies partly in the continued vitality of community-based organization. The existence of village forums, local meetings, religious and social associations, and district-level planning communication creates a civic substrate from which participation can be repeatedly drawn.[35] Institutionalization begins here. Participation becomes durable when society already possesses the collective forms through which issues can be recognized and brought forward.

Civil Society as Mediator of Citizen Concerns

A second function concerns mediation. Civil society institutionalizes participation when it translates lived problems into publicly legible claims.[36] This function is central because ordinary grievances do not automatically appear as political issues. They require interpretation, articulation, and movement across the boundary between social experience and public decision-making.

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[29] Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 87-115.

[30] Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 163-185.

[31] Michael W. Foley and Bob Edwards, "The Paradox of Civil Society," *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 3 (1996): 38-52; Simone Chambers and Jeffrey Kopstein, "Bad Civil Society," *Political Theory* 29, no. 6 (2001): 837-865.

[32] Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Lombok Barat, *Kabupaten Lombok Barat Dalam Angka 2026*.

[33] Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Lombok Barat, *Statistik Daerah Kabupaten Lombok Barat 2025*.

[34] Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, 492-514.

[35] Narmada Kabupaten Lombok Barat, "Musrembangdes Desa Senggigi Bahas dan Tetapkan RKPDes 2026 serta DU RKPDes 2027"; PPID Kabupaten Lombok Barat, *Renstra Badan Kesatuan Bangsa dan Politik Kabupaten Lombok Barat 2019-2024* (Gerung: Pemerintah Kabupaten Lombok Barat, 2021).

[36] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 231-250.

Habermas provides one influential vocabulary for this process by emphasizing the public sphere as a communicative arena through which issues move toward public visibility.[37] Later participatory theorists deepen this insight by stressing practical problem-solving, empowered participation, and the importance of institutional channels that receive civic communication.[38] The common point is clear. Participation requires mediating actors that can connect everyday experience to political institutions.

This mediating role is especially important in West Lombok because local democracy unfolds across unequal social capacities. Some citizens possess familiarity with administrative procedures, language, and office networks. Others do not. Civil society organizations, community leaders, citizen groups, and issue-based associations can reduce this inequality by helping residents formulate proposals, interpret procedures, and sustain claims beyond the moment of initial complaint.[39]

This is why citizen participation should not be reduced to attendance figures. High turnout at a consultation forum may indicate public interest, but democratic institutionalization requires a second step: the ability to turn presence into intelligible voice. Planning mechanisms such as musrenbang, public consultations, and district coordination processes become more democratic when civil society actors perform this mediating labor.[40]

The available local record supports this interpretation. West Lombok's planning and public information materials repeatedly frame participation in terms of consultation, problem mapping, and community involvement across village and district processes.[41] Such language implies more than numerical attendance. It implies communicative translation. Citizens are expected to bring social problems into a format that can enter planning sequences. Civil society becomes the bridge that makes such translation possible.

Repetition, Procedure, and the Durability of Participation

A third function of civil society concerns repetition. Participation becomes institutionalized when it is not only possible but expected to recur through known procedures.[42] Democratic participation weakens when access depends on exceptional mobilization, personal invitation, or crisis. It strengthens when citizens know that there are periodic arenas in which they can appear, speak, monitor, and press claims.

West Lombok's participatory architecture already contains several recurring sites. Village development deliberations, district coordination, public consultations, electoral oversight

[37] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 181-235.

[38] Fung, "Recipes for Public Spheres," 338-367; Jane Mansbridge et al., "A Systemic Approach to Deliberative Democracy," in *Deliberative Systems: Deliberative Democracy at the Large Scale*, ed. John Parkinson and Jane Mansbridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1-26.

[39] Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus: Unequal Political Voice and the Broken Promise of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1-28.

[40] Fung, "Recipes for Public Spheres," 350-361.

[41] PPID Kabupaten Lombok Barat, *Dokumen Rancangan Awal Rencana Kerja 2026*; Narmada Kabupaten Lombok Barat, "Sosialisasi Kamus Usulan Permasalahan Tahun 2027 Digelar di Kecamatan Batulayar."

[42] Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*, 58-102.

initiatives, and sectoral forums all create repeated occasions for engagement.[43] This matters because repetition forms democratic memory. Citizens learn where participation occurs, which procedures matter, who listens, and how claims circulate. Repetition turns civic participation from improvisation into routine.[44]

Civil society is indispensable to this process because institutions alone do not generate civic continuity. Administrative forums may exist on paper yet remain inert in practice. Civic organizations and community networks keep them alive by preparing participants, circulating information, following up decisions, and returning across cycles.[45] In this sense, civil society does not merely use participatory institutions. It animates them.

The durability of participation is also linked to the local state's recognition of recurring engagement. Planning documents in Lombok Barat connect development processes to consultation and participation, while public files concerning local government work plans refer to improving participation in village planning forums.[46] These documents show that procedural repetition is already present as an administrative aspiration. The democratic challenge is whether civic actors can occupy these repeated spaces consistently enough to generate influence.

Ostrom's broader insight about institutions is helpful here. Institutional life depends on repeated interaction, predictable rules, and shared expectations.[47] Participation becomes stable under similar conditions. Citizens must know that entering a forum is not futile; officials must know that participation will recur; and organizations must know that civic preparation has somewhere to go. In West Lombok, civil society's contribution lies precisely in sustaining this repeated movement between community concerns and public institutions.

Inclusion, Representation, and the Breadth of Democratic Participation

Participation becomes democratically meaningful only when it broadens representation rather than hardening voice in the hands of socially advantaged actors.[48] Civil society institutionalizes participation, therefore, through inclusion. This involves widening civic access across gender, age, disability, class, and territorial differences. It also involves resisting the reduction of "public participation" to the speech of already-connected intermediaries.

This problem is not peripheral. Democratic theory has repeatedly shown that participation can reproduce inequality when civic resources are unequally distributed.[49] Some groups possess

[43] PPID Kabupaten Lombok Barat, *Dokumen Penetapan RPD Lombok Barat Tahun 2025-2026*; Narmada Kabupaten Lombok Barat, "Musrembangdes Desa Senggigi Bahas dan Tetapkan RKPDes 2026 serta DU RKPDes 2027"; Bawaslu Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, "Bawaslu NTB dan Kemenag NTB Teken MoU, Perkuat Pengawasan Partisipatif Pemilu."

[44] Charles Tilly, *Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 13-33.

[45] Edwards, *Civil Society*, 111-126.

[46] PPID Kabupaten Lombok Barat, *Dokumen Rancangan Awal Rencana Kerja 2026*; Kabupaten Lombok Barat, *Peraturan Daerah Kabupaten Lombok Barat Nomor 4 Tahun 2025 tentang Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Panjang Daerah Kabupaten Lombok Barat Tahun 2025-2045*.

[47] Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*, 90-102.

[48] Dahl, *On Democracy*, 70-86.

[49] Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus*, 529-543; Gaventa, "Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis," *IDS Bulletin* 37, no. 6 (2006): 23-33.

time, education, networks, and confidence; others face barriers of recognition and procedure. Institutionalization in the full democratic sense must therefore include representational breadth. Participation should be stable, but it should also be socially porous.

Local oversight materials from West Lombok and the province are important here. Bawaslu initiatives have explicitly engaged participatory oversight with vulnerable groups, community organizations, and broader publics in Lombok Barat and Nusa Tenggara Barat.[50] These efforts indicate an important democratic principle: participation becomes stronger when institutions and civic actors actively widen who is invited and equipped to take part. Similarly, public planning discourse in village and district settings points toward the need to involve multiple stakeholders rather than rely on narrow administrative communication.[51]

Civil society contributes in two ways. First, it reaches constituencies that formal institutions often fail to organize effectively. Second, it gives these constituencies a public form that can endure across time.[52] Women's groups, youth organizations, disability forums, village-based associations, and local issue networks expand the social breadth of participation. Their role is not merely additive. They alter the representative character of the public sphere.

For West Lombok, this inclusive dimension is especially important because the regency's social geography is varied. Participation that is concentrated only in district centers, administrative elites, or already-organized sectors will fall short of democratic depth.[53] Civil society helps correct this tendency by carrying participation into the wider territorial and social life of the regency. Institutionalization is achieved not when participation becomes merely regular, but when regular participation becomes socially representative.

Policy Feedback, Oversight, and Democratic Consequence

The final and decisive function concerns consequence. Citizen participation becomes institutionalized only when it can feed back into oversight, public reasoning, and policy adjustment.[54] Without consequence, participation risks becoming ceremonial. Citizens may speak, attend, and deliberate, yet nothing changes in the rhythms of governance. Democratic disappointment then accumulates, and participation loses credibility.

This is where the relation between civil society and public institutions becomes most visible. Civil society protects the democratic value of participation by following up claims, monitoring processes, contesting procedural closure, and keeping issues public after the forum ends.[55] Electoral oversight offers one clear example. Participatory democracy is not exhausted by voting; it also

[50] Bawaslu Kabupaten Lombok Barat, "Bawaslu Lombok Barat Gelar Fasilitasi Penguatan Pemahaman Kepemiluan bagi Penyandang"; Bawaslu Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, "Merangkul Kelompok Rentan, Bawaslu NTB Teguhkan Pengawasan Partisipatif."

[51] Narmada Kabupaten Lombok Barat, "Musrembangdes Desa Senggigi Bahas dan Tetapkan RKPDes 2026 serta DU RKPDes 2027."

[52] Warren, *Democracy and Association*, 153-177.

[53] Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Lombok Barat, *Kabupaten Lombok Barat Dalam Angka 2026*; Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, *Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat Dalam Angka 2026*.

[54] Jonathan Fox, "Social Accountability," 346-361; World Bank, *World Development Report 2004: Making Services Work for Poor People* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2004), 49-78.

[55] Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*, 162-187.

includes the social vigilance that helps protect electoral fairness. Public initiatives by Bawaslu in West Lombok and the province indicate that democratic oversight is increasingly imagined as a shared civic responsibility rather than a task monopolized by state agencies.[56]

The same logic applies beyond elections. Development planning and public consultation become institutionally meaningful when there are visible chains between participation and response. Citizens must be able to observe whether concerns are recorded, filtered, deferred, revised, or acted upon.[57] Civil society organizations, media channels, and community networks all help maintain this chain of visibility. They prevent the public trace of participation from disappearing inside administration.

For West Lombok, the democratic issue is therefore not the absence of participatory language. The issue is the conversion of participatory presence into policy memory. Public documents, planning forums, and oversight programs suggest that the architecture of participation exists.[58] The task of civil society is to make that architecture consequential. This requires documentation, follow-up, monitoring, issue persistence, and the capacity to re-enter institutions when responses are weak or incomplete.

A useful way to synthesize the discussion is to say that civil society institutionalizes citizen participation in West Lombok through five interdependent functions:

1. Associational carriers: the collective social forms that enable citizens to gather and coordinate.
2. Civic mediation: the translation of everyday problems into public claims.
3. Procedural repetition: recurring access to participatory forums and oversight arenas.
4. Inclusive representation: widening participation across social and territorial differences.
5. Democratic consequence: the capacity to connect participation to oversight, response, and policy feedback.

These functions should not be separated analytically in practice. Associational carriers without mediation produce inward-looking groups. Mediation without repetition produces short-lived visibility. Repetition without inclusion narrows democracy into managed participation. Inclusion without consequence creates frustration. Consequence without civic organization remains unstable.[59] Institutionalized participation requires the whole sequence.

West Lombok's importance lies in the fact that this sequence is already partially visible. The regency possesses social density, recurring planning procedures, village-level participatory sites, and public oversight initiatives. These conditions do not guarantee democratic depth, but they create a

[56] Bawaslu Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, "Bawaslu NTB dan Kemenag NTB Teken MoU, Perkuat Pengawasan Partisipatif Pemilu"; Bawaslu Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, "Merangkul Kelompok Rentan, Bawaslu NTB Teguhkan Pengawasan Partisipatif."

[57] Fox, "Social Accountability," 348-356.

[58] PPID Kabupaten Lombok Barat, *Dokumen Penetapan RPD Lombok Barat Tahun 2025-2026*; PPID Kabupaten Lombok Barat, *Dokumen Rancangan Awal Rencana Kerja 2026*.

[59] Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, 562-563; Fung, "Recipes for Public Spheres," 363-367.

plausible foundation on which civil society can transform participation from episodic voice into durable public practice.[60]

Conclusion

This article has argued that the democratic significance of civil society in West Lombok Regency lies in its role in institutionalizing citizen participation. Participation becomes durable when it is socially carried, publicly mediated, procedurally repeated, inclusively widened, and linked to visible consequence. Under this view, civil society is not merely a peripheral moral sphere standing outside the state. It is a practical democratic infrastructure through which citizens acquire recurring access to public life.

The article's main analytical contribution is a five-part framework for understanding participatory institutionalization in West Lombok: associational carriers, civic mediation, procedural repetition, inclusive representation, and democratic consequence. This framework helps explain why participation can appear lively yet remain shallow. Democratic participation is strengthened not by momentary mobilization alone, but by the gradual sedimentation of civic routines, organizational capacity, and institutional responsiveness.

The practical implication is clear. Strengthening participation in West Lombok requires more than holding formal forums. It requires reinforcing the civic organizations, village networks, public communication channels, and oversight practices that allow citizens to return repeatedly to the public arena with organized claims. Participatory institutions become democratic when society can inhabit them with continuity and when public authorities generate visible responses to civic input.

A further implication concerns local democratic strategy. West Lombok already possesses important participatory foundations in planning, village deliberation, and civic oversight. The next step lies in consolidating these foundations so that participation is not confined to exceptional moments or administrative ritual. Civil society carries this task because it binds social life to public consequence. Where that binding becomes stable, citizen participation acquires institutional form and democratic life becomes more durable.

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[60] Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Lombok Barat, *Kabupaten Lombok Barat Dalam Angka 2026*; Bawaslu Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, "Merangkul Kelompok Rentan, Bawaslu NTB Teguhkan Pengawasan Partisipatif."

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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.[1] 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.[2] For that reason, the relation between civil society and the public sphere remains one of the decisive questions of democratic theory.

[1] 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.

[2] 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.[3] 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.[4] 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.[5]

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.[6] 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.[7]

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.[8] At the same time, Indonesian democracy faces persistent pressures generated by oligarchic influence, unequal communicative resources, disinformation, clientelism, and uneven associational capacity across regions.[9] 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.[10] Official regional planning documents describe the regency as undergoing structural change associated with economic diversification, service expansion, and governance reform.[11] At the same time, statistical publications portray a socially diverse district whose

[3] 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.

[4] Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 52-56.

[5] 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.

[6] Charles Tilly, *Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 13-18.

[7] Mark E. Warren, *Democracy and Association* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 61-67.

[8] Indonesia, *Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages*; Indonesia, *Law No. 14 of 2008 on Public Information Openness*.

[9] 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.

[10] 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.

[11] Ibid., 4.1-4.12.

democratic life is shaped by both rural sociality and growing connectivity.[12] 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.[13] The public sphere has therefore become hybrid. Face-to-face discussion remains important, but digital communication increasingly amplifies, accelerates, and sometimes distorts local discourse.[14] 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.[15] 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.[16] The analysis is conceptual and contextual at once. It reconstructs the normative functions of civil society and the

[12] Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, *Kabupaten Lombok Tengah Dalam Angka 2025* (Praya: BPS Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, 2025), xv-xxi.

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

[14] DataReportal, *Digital 2026: Indonesia* (2025); Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2025: Indonesia* (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2025).

[15] 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).

[16] 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.[17] 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.[18]

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.[19] 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.[20] 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.[21] These are employed

[17] 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.

[18] 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.

[19] 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).

[20] Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, *Kabupaten Lombok Tengah Dalam Angka 2025*; Pemerintah Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, *RPJMD 2021-2026*.

[21] 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.[22] 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.[23] 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.[24]

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.[25] 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

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

[23] Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 123-27.

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

[25] Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, *Kabupaten Lombok Tengah Dalam Angka 2025*, 3-18.

authority can be submitted to critical reason.[26] Yet later democratic theory has shown that actually existing public spheres are always marked by inequality, exclusion, and competition among publics.[27] 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.[28] 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.[29] 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.[30] 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

[26] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 36-43.
[27] Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 49-55; Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 124-29.
[28] Warren, *Democracy and Association*, 72-78.
[29] Pemerintah Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, *RPJMD 2021-2026*, 5.1-5.23.
[30] Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*, 2-5.

the state or the market.[31] 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.[32] 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.[33] 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.[34] 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.[35] 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.[36] 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.[37] 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.[38]

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

[31] Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, 531-33.
[32] Pemerintah Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, *RPJMD 2021-2026*, 3.18-3.39.
[33] Tilly, *Democracy*, 14-23; Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 233-36.
[34] Komisi Pemilihan Umum Republik Indonesia, *Peraturan Komisi Pemilihan Umum Nomor 9 Tahun 2022*.
[35] Komisi Pemilihan Umum Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, *Keputusan … Nomor 676 Tahun 2024*.
[36] UNDP, *Public Sphere for Democratic Governance and Development*, 14-19.
[37] DataReportal, *Digital 2026: Indonesia*; Dewan Pers, *Pedoman Pemberitaan Media Siber* (Jakarta: Dewan Pers, 2012).
[38] 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.[39]

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.[40] 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.[41] 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.[42] 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.

[39] 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.

[40] UNDP, *Public Sphere for Democratic Governance and Development*, 21-27.

[41] Pemerintah Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, *RPJMD 2021-2026*, 6.1-6.18.

[42] 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.[43] The public sphere itself may be distorted by unequal access, strategic manipulation, and symbolic domination.[44] 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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[43] Foley and Edwards, "The Paradox of Civil Society," 47-49; Edwards, *Civil Society*, 95-103.
[44] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 12-13; Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 124-29.

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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.

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[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.

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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.

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[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.

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[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 Indepedensi 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]

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

[36] Bawaslu Kota Mataram, "Isi Diskusi AJI Mataram, Bawaslu Komat Bedah Indepedensi 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 Indepedensi 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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[55] UNESCO, *Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms*, 30-44; United Nations Development Programme, *Public Sphere for Democratic Governance and Development* (New York: UNDP, 2024), 19-33.

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