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Outsmarting and Outlasting Autocratic Actors

A Baseline Study Report for Connect, Defend, Act!

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Glossary

Assertion	A form of digital activism that refers to the act of creating and sharing one's own social media content, which falls under digital spectator activities (see George & Leidner 2019).
Authoritarian Playbook	A framework introduced by Protect Democracy (2022) that maps out autocrats' moves in eroding democracy. It includes politicizing independent institutions, spreading disinformation, aggrandizing executive power, quashing criticism or dissent, scapegoating vulnerable communities, corrupting elections, and stoking violence.
Boiling Frog Syndrome	A phenomenon that refers to disregard in the face of a gradually changing situation, up until it brings undesirable consequences.
Bonding	A concept from the studies of ethnic conflicts, which (opposite to bridging) refers to a type of social capital that ties members of the same race, religion, ethnicity, profession, and other social groupings (see Putnam 2001 and Varshney 2002).
Botivism	A form of digital activism that refers to a virtual activist, or the use of bots in social media social activism environments, which falls under digital transitional activities (see George & Leidner 2019).
Bridging	A concept from the studies of ethnic conflicts, which (opposite to bonding) refers to a type of social capital that connects members of different races, religions, ethnicities, professions, and other social groupings (see Putnam 2001 and Varshney 2002).
Civic Spacetime	Our reconceptualization of "civic space," to denote that the problem is not just the narrowing of spaces but also the diminution of time to invest in taking care of those spaces.
Clicktivism	A form of digital activism that refers to the act of liking, upvoting, or following an activist's social media posts or blogs, which falls under digital spectator activities (see George & Leidner 2019).
Data Activism	A form of digital activism that comprises different forms of political activity and social activism, aiming to enhance one's power over personal data held by other entities, which falls under digital gladiatorial activities (see George & Leidner 2019).
Digital Activism	A form of social activism that is digitally mediated, comprised of three categories: digital spectator activities, digital transitional activities, and digital gladiatorial activities (see George & Leidner 2019).
Digital Petitions	A form of digital activism that refers to online petitions allowing citizens to request the reassessment of certain actions or policies, which falls under digital transitional activities (see George & Leidner 2019).
E-funding	A form of digital activism that refers to the use of technology to gather revenue for one's cause, which falls under digital transitional activities (see George & Leidner 2019).

Exposure	A form of digital activism that refers to the unwarranted dissemination of confidential information, which falls under digital gladiatorial activities (see George & Leidner 2019).
Hacktivism	A form of digital activism that refers to the conduct of hacking to achieve a certain social or political objective, which falls under digital gladiatorial activities (see George & Leidner 2019).
Metavoicing	A form of digital activism that refers to the act of sharing, retweeting, reporting, and commenting on others' social media posts, which falls under digital spectator activities (see George & Leidner 2019).
Moral *Jiu-jitsu*	A term in nonviolence studies that refers to opponents being thrown off balance morally upon being at the receiving end of a specific tactic of nonviolent resistance.
Noncooperation	A term in nonviolence studies coined by Gene Sharp (1973) that refers to methods of nonviolent action where actors not only demonstrate resistance, but also withdraw their participation from the practices or institutions they oppose.
Nonviolent Intervention	A term in nonviolence studies coined by Gene Sharp (1973) that refers to methods of nonviolent action where actors not only demonstrate resistance and withdraw their participation, but also aim to disrupt the practices or institutions they oppose.
Nonviolent Resistance	A term that goes interchangeably with nonviolent action, civil resistance, direct action, works as an umbrella term for various methods of waving conflict that refrain from using violence, at least against others (see Weber and Burrowes 1991).
Philanthropic Protectionism	A concept introduced by the Transnational Institute (2017) to denote a series of government-imposed constraints to hinder domestic CSOs' ability to get international funding.
Pillars of Support	A framework from nonviolence studies that maps out the opponent's support base (see Popovic 2007).
Points of Intervention	A framework from nonviolence studies that maps out interventions into point of production, point of destruction, point of consumption, point of decision, point of assumption, and point of opportunity (see Reinsborough & Canning 2017).
Political Consumerism	A form of digital activism that refers to purchasing habits that are in line with one's politics and positionality, specifically through digital applications, which falls under digital transitional activities (see George & Leidner 2019).
Political *Jiu-jitsu*	A term in nonviolence studies that refers to opponents being thrown off balance politically upon being at the receiving end of a specific tactic of nonviolent resistance.
Protest and Persuasion	A term in nonviolence studies coined by Gene Sharp (1973) that refers to methods of nonviolent action where actors "simply" show that they are against or for something.
Reformasi	A term that denotes Indonesia's transition to democracy in the late 1990s.
Spectrum of Allies	A framework from nonviolence studies that maps out actors into active allies, passive allies, neutral, passive opponents, and active opponents (see Boyd 2012).

Abbreviations

AJI	Aliansi Jurnalis Independen
CSA	Civil Society Actor
DCTD	Dana Cepat Tanggap Darurat
DPD	Damai Pangkal Damai
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
FH	Freedom House
GEDI	Gender Equality, Disability, and Inclusion
ICSF	Indonesia Civil Society Forum
Japelidi	Jaringan Pegiat Literasi Digital
KBB	Koalisi Kebebasan Beragama dan Berkeyakinan
KKJ	Komisi Keselamatan Jurnalis
Komnas HAM	Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia
Komnas Perempuan	Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan
KPA	Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria
KPK	Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi
KUPI	Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia
LBH	Lembaga Bantuan Hukum
MAFINDO	Masyarakat Anti-Fitnah Indonesia
MBKM	Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
PAM Swakarsa	Pasukan Pengamanan Masyarakat Swakarsa
PSHK	Pusat Studi Hukum dan Kebijakan
PSN	Proyek Strategis Nasional
SISTER-DIKTI	Sistem Informasi Sumber Daya Terintegrasi Pendidikan Tinggi
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
UCP	Unarmed Civilian Protection

UN	United Nations
UU ITE	Undang-undang Teknologi Informasi Elektronik
UU Ormas	Undang-undang Organisasi Masyarakat
V-Dem	Varieties of Democracy
YLBHI	Yayasan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia

Executive Summary

Our baseline study is designed to inform Connect, Defend, Act! (CDA), a project conceived by Hivos and Humanis under the support of the Norwegian Agency for Development and Cooperation (NORAD). With a particular focus on Indonesia, we look at the threats that civil society actors (CSAs) are facing, map their ecosystems and capacities, and put forward strategies to support them.

Relying on desk research and key informant interviews, our 15-day baseline study commits itself to feminist methodologies of pluriversality, intersubjectivity, intersectionality, and positionality. That said, we did not come in with our pre-defined notions of civic society and CSAs—rather, we try to understand how these are understood and lived by the subjects of this study. In selecting publications to review and participants to interview, we center the perspectives of women, youth, SOGIESC diverse groups, as well as other minorities and marginalized groups. Our preliminary readings led us to reconceptualizing "civic space" into "civic spacetime" and to treating connect-defend-act not as a linear sequence. Our main findings are as follows.

The Boiling Frog Syndrome: Shrinking Civic Spacetime in Slow Motion

Amidst the ongoing third wave of autocratization, CSAs worldwide are facing opponents who do not simply dismiss democracy altogether, but instead outplay them in utilizing democratic measures to consolidate power. Given how subtly, gradually, and slowly democracy has been eroded in Indonesia, it is no wonder shrinking civic space has not been met by massive public concern and outcry. Also, the abundance of (former) NGO workers and academics with and for the government provides an illusion, or façade, that democracy is "*baik-baik saja*" (doing fine). Any pushback against shrinking civic space needs to seriously pay attention not only on the contraction of maneuvering, living, digital, contestation, and private spaces, but also the diminution of the time to invest in and take care of those spaces. The problem is not simply CSAs losing the space to push back against autocratization, but also CSAs losing substantial time (and energy) to do so.

The Matrix of Resistance: Rethinking Allies and Strategies

Thinly stretched and overwhelmed, CSAs in Indonesia need to broaden their "save civic spacetime" lineup. They need to forge alliances beyond the usual suspects and prioritize including the most vulnerable and marginalized. Also, they need to widen their targets to include points of production and consumption, seeing that existing interventions tend to focus on points of decisions and destruction. Here, CSAs need to enhance skills in brokering different groups, weaving intersectional solidarity, and in *unarmed civilian protection* (UCP).

Apocalypse Not: Innovate or Succumb

CSAs in Indonesia have relied on limited, predictable, low-intensity methods of nonviolent resistance and digital activism. To disrupt the authoritarian agenda effectively, CSAs need to up their skills in imposing relevant dilemma actions to opponents, most likely by engaging in novel, high-intensity methods of resistance and activism that would catch opponents off guard. More fundamentally, CSAs need to switch from defense to offense mode. Looking into the authoritarian playbook, it should be clear what the autocrats' next moves would be—as well as what CSAs need to do to outsmart and outlast those autocrats.

Recommendations

For CSAs
1. **Weave Intersectional Solidarity**
   - Continuously map and update the Spectrum of Allies across regions, sectors, and networks. Actively engage neutral actors and passive allies who may otherwise be swayed by autocrats. Early entrance, low bar, systematic outreach: start at schools/homes, don't be picky, go wild!
   - Actively lend privilege to individuals and groups facing specific risks and challenges given their intersecting identities (gender, ethnicity, class, etc.).
2. **Anticipate Scenarios and Draw Red Lines**
   - Develop pre-emptive strategies and simulations for potential future attacks on civic spacetime.
   - Collaboratively establish clear "red lines" against authoritarian strategies. Publicize these lines and prepare collective responses, such as widespread nonviolent resistance when these lines are crossed.
3. **Strengthen Resistance Tactics**
   - Refine Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) through stress-testing and simulations.
   - Broaden nonviolent resistance repertoire, including dilemma actions and diverse points of intervention.
   - Step up legal and political challenges against restrictive laws (i.e. ITE and Ormas) and document their negative impacts on human rights. Engage with the judiciary as the remaining viable constitutional avenue, beyond remedial approaches.
4. **Revamp Civic Education and Public Awareness**
   - Actively promote critical thinking, democratic values, and human rights, especially among youth.
   - Amplify information about democratic backsliding beyond activist circles.
   - Develop and disseminate counter-narratives, i.e. that frames social justice struggles as civic duty (instead of sheer insubordination) and act of love (instead of being unpatriotic).

For Donors
1. **Step Up Financial and Technical Support for CSAs**
   - Increase support for CSAs defending democracy and human rights, especially in the face of Indonesia's autocratic drift. Support flexible and rapid emergency funds as well as capacity-building initiatives, training, and resources for local trainers. Endorse stress-testing SOP and unarmed civilian protection schemes for vulnerable CSAs. Apply accountability procedures that are less bureaucratic and time-consuming.
   - Provide sufficient resources for localized and issue-based civic space monitoring.
   - Provide support for instilling critical thinking and human rights into civic education, as well as for developing pro-democracy counter-narratives.
2. **Promote International Advocacy**
   - Encourage CSAs to report the impacts of restrictive laws and rights-violations to international human rights platforms, raising awareness and seeking external pressure on Indonesia's government to uphold its international human rights commitments.

For the Indonesian Government
1. **Protect Civic Spacetime and the Rule of Law**
   - Revoke or revise laws and regulations passed by previous administrations that have led to the shrinking of civic spacetime in recent years, including UU ITE, UU Ormas, etc.
2. **Protect activists and prosecute perpetrators**
   - Assure the safety and well-being of activists and journalists. Attacks on CSAs and journalists should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.
3. **Reform Civic Education**
   - Revamp school and university curricula to foster a critical and informed citizenry rather than a passive workforce. Human rights and social justice need to be at the core of this curricula.

Outsmarting and Outlasting Autocratic Actors

A Baseline Study Report for Connect, Defend, Act!

"*Oh, please, not another report on shrinking civic space in Indonesia.*" Rest assured, we are aware that many organizations have put together compelling overviews and analyses on the topic. To honor their hard work, we strive to go beyond (re-)reporting on the issue and offer one that allows democracy-loving actors to effectively push back against the shrinking civic space.

Rationale: Why We Do This

Our title, "Outsmarting and Outlasting Autocratic Actors," speaks to the fact that autocratic actors worldwide have been very adept in utilizing democratic procedures to come into power and eventually erode democracy from within. Recognizing that civil society actors (CSAs) in Indonesia have been actively pushing back against this trend, we situate this baseline study as an effort to help increase their margins of success.

More particularly, our baseline study is designed to inform Connect, Defend, Act! (CDA), a project conceived by Hivos and Humanis under the support of the Norwegian Agency for Development and Cooperation (NORAD). The project is set to respond to shrinking civic space in Colombia, Indonesia, Malawi, and the occupied Palestinian territory and amplify CSA-led actions in said localities. It aims to strategically support relevant actors within civil society whose work actively contributes to civic space, and do so from the perspectives of different sectors and interests, particularly those who have been marginalized, such as women, youth, SOGIESC diverse persons, and indigenous people. The project commits itself to promoting local ownership and leadership, with Hivos and Humanis taking a facilitating and supporting role that emphasizes CSAs' agency and existing knowledge.

Methodology: How We Do Things

Building upon the terms of references from Hivos and Humanis (see Annex 1), we see that our baseline study should map out digital and holistic threats faced by CSAs, as well as their modalities and levels of capacities to respond to said threats—ultimately pointing at strategies that are needed to ensure that CSAs can effectively push back against shrinking civic space. We understand that it is imperative to do so in ways that center voices of underserved rightsholders, such as women, youth, SOGIESC diverse persons, and other marginalized groups. Amongst others, we look at how three specific infrastructures, namely laws and regulations, elections, and coalitions or networks among CSAs, contribute to the challenges faced by CSAs and the capacities at their disposal.

We commit ourselves to feminist methodologies of pluriversality, intersubjectivity, intersectionality, and positionality. We believe that the shrinking of civic spaces is experienced differently by different individuals depending on the multiple identities each of them embodies. We also recognize that being Java-based Muslim middle-class able-bodied heteronormative women–with the exception of one team member being a Balinese Hindu woman and one team member being a white man–we carry certain biases and blind spots. Altogether, the above predispositions compel us to be very

intentional in shelving our biases, selecting our subject participants, centering the lived experience of marginalized groups, and practicing our duty of care to everyone involved in our study.

This 15-day baseline study adopts two main data collection strategies. The first is desk research of more than 60 reports and academic publications, as well as 6 datasets. While centering those prepared by local individuals and organizations, we situate them within the larger trend at the global level. The second is key informant interviews of 20 individuals, whose demographic disaggregated data are presented in Annex 2.

In terms of organizing and analyzing our data, we make use of The Authoritarian Playbook and rely heavily on a number of frameworks from nonviolent resistance studies, namely Spectrum of Allies, Points of Intervention, and Pillars of Support. We believe said frameworks allow the data to be more readily actionable by CSAs, especially community organizers and human rights defenders. To avoid misrepresentation and assure the quality of this report, we sent out an earlier version of this report to all resource persons involved in the baseline study and two external reviewers, and revised the draft according to their inputs.

Like all studies, ours is bound by a number of limitations. The most obvious is that, given the 15 days timeframe for research design, data collection, data analysis, and reporting, we had to rely more on desk research than key informant interviews. Keeping in mind that we can only perform interviews with a handful of people, we prioritize those whose voices have not been represented enough in publicly available reports and media, those living and working outside of Java, women, youth, and SOGIESC minorities, as well as those working in the NGOs, legal aid institutions (Lembaga Bantuan Hukum, henceforth LBH), journalism, and academic sectors. Given time limitation, we only engage lightly with CSAs from the art scenes and have not engaged with those from political parties and donor agencies. While we see them as part of the CSA ecosystem, they have not really been at the forefront of pushing back against autocratization, nor at the receiving end of state repression, at least compared to those mentioned before.

We limit our analysis to providing strategies for CSAs, not to analyzing in detail the causes, forms, and intensities of the shrinking civic space in Indonesia. For the latter, we rely on the many reports that have been thoughtfully prepared and shared by a wide range of local and international NGOs.

Outline: What to Expect in this Report

We organize this report according to the connect-defend-act sequence of the CDA project, preceded by a big picture of the shrinking civic space in Indonesia. It is important to note that we stay away from conceptualizing connect, defend, and act as linear. As elaborated at the end of the next chapter, we understand that "act" or "defend" may actually come first.

The Big Picture. This chapter provides an overview of what has been said and written about the shrinking civic space in Indonesia. It offers three things: a reading that situates Indonesia within the global trend, a (re)concept(ion) of civic spacetime, and a brief along The Authoritarian Playbook.

Connect. Utilizing the Spectrum of Allies framework, this chapter discusses who constitutes the civil society, where CSAs stand *vis a vis* each other, as well as what allows them to—and bars them from—connecting to one another. It highlights four observations: the pluriversality of civic spacetimes in Indonesia, the call for more actors to join the "save civic spacetime" lineup, the need to build a stronger cohesion amongst CSAs, and the urgency to center Papua.

Defend. Using the Points of Intervention framework, this chapter discusses what CSAs have done to hold the line and push back against shrinking civic spacetime. It underlines four observations: the thinly-stretched and overwhelmed civil society, the opportunity to pick up new and more intensive repertoires of actions, the need to spread out and focus on untapped parts of the system, and the pressing capacity building wish list.

Act. Building upon other chapters, this chapter endorses three strategies: crowding the spacetime, pushing where it matters, and playing offense.

The Big Picture

A lot has been said about Indonesia's shrinking civic space and how it has impacted CSAs. This chapter provides an overview of those while putting forward three things. First, we situate Indonesia's shrinking civic space within the global trend—more specifically, within the context of the third wave of autocratization. Second, we center the various local conceptions of civic space by reconceptualizing it into "civic spacetime." Third, we utilize The Authoritarian Playbook to collate the mechanisms as to how shrinking civic spacetime took place in Indonesia throughout the last decade.

Here, we emphasize on how skillful autocratic actors have been, not just in the "space" dimension, but also the "time" dimension. They strategically chose to ever so gradually erode the space in which democracy is lived, putting large parts of civil society into a "boiling frog syndrome." It is no wonder then that the ongoing shrinking civic space has not been met by massive public concern and outcry, despite global indices showing a constant decline of civil liberties in Indonesia throughout the decade.

Indonesia in the Global Trend: The Third Wave of Autocratization

We find it important to situate the ongoing shrinking of civic space in Indonesia within the very specific context of the third wave of autocratization. Here, as Barbara Geddes (forthcoming) and Lührman & Lindberg (2019) point out, democracy is being crippled by actors who skillfully rose to power through democratic procedures. This is unlike in the earlier waves, where autocracies were installed through military coups in newly independent Global South states (1960-1970s) or by personalist leaders in newly independent post-Soviet states (1990s). In other words, this time around, we are facing actors who do not simply dismiss democracy altogether, but instead outplay CSAs in utilizing democratic measures to consolidate their power.

This trend is apparent in major democracy indices, including Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), Freedom House (FH), Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), and Polity IV. V-Dem points out that the level of democracy enjoyed by the average person in 2023 was down to that of 1985. FH shows that throughout 2023, 52 countries experienced a decline in their democracy score, while only 21 countries had their scores improve. A bit more daring, EIU mentions that for that same year, 68 countries had their democracy scores going down while 32 countries had theirs up. Not only do the indices display an overall decline in the quality of democracy worldwide, they also report more substantial declines in liberal democracy scores (V-Dem), civil liberty scores (FH), or freedom of association scores (EIU), compared to other scores related to elections and political institutions.

Indonesia conforms to the above patterns. V-Dem listed Indonesia as one of the largest democracies within the category of autocratizers (2023), very close to becoming an electoral autocracy (2024). FH downgraded Indonesia from free to partly free (2014-2024). Meanwhile, EIU classified Indonesia as a flawed democracy (2024). As seen in Graphs 1-3, Indonesia's civil liberties score plummeted more compared to its other or overall scores. Zooming in on Graph 3, we see that despite the steep decline, Indonesia still scores above the global average. We suppose, this helps explain why many Indonesians failed to fully grasp that autocratization has been underway for at

least a decade now, thus did not use the 2024 presidential election to vote out those responsible for eroding civil liberties and democracy altogether.
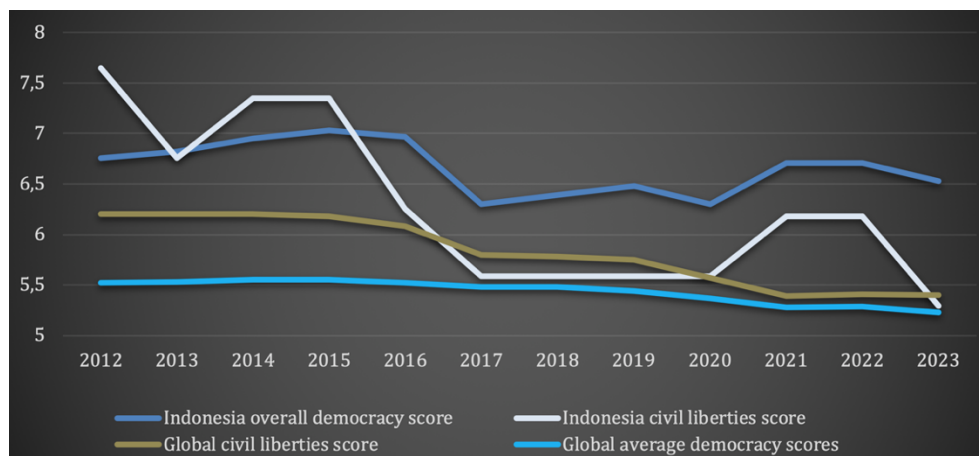
Graph 1. Indonesia's Democracy Score 2016-2023 According to Varieties of Democracy
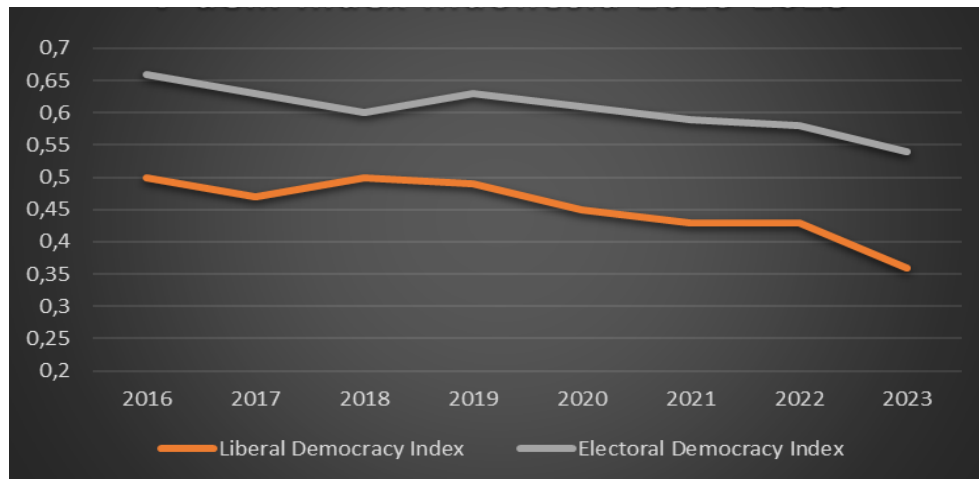
Graph 2. Indonesia's Democracy Score 2016-2023 According to Freedom House
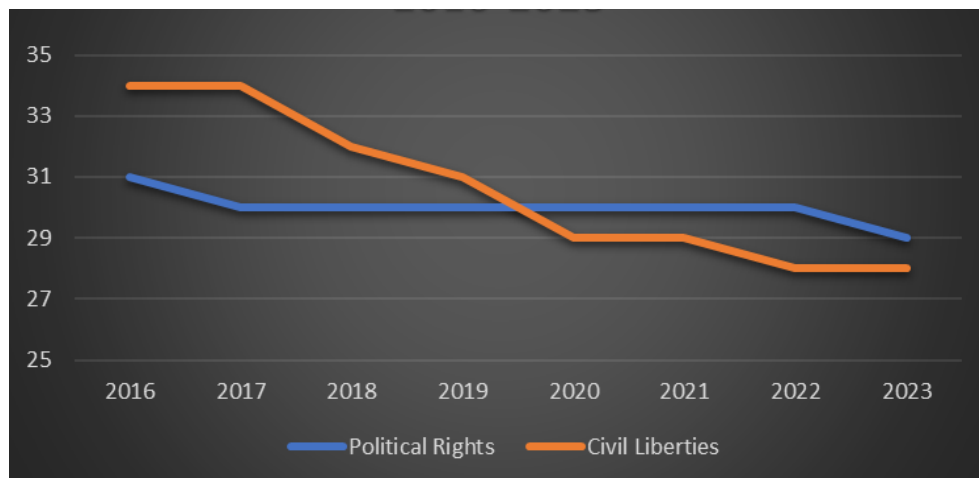

Graph 3. Indonesia's Democracy Score 2016-2023 According to Economist Intelligence Unit

Despite citizens taking to the streets and to their gadgets to save democracy, Indonesia's civic space remained obstructed, as per CIVICUS' assessments. Again, Indonesia seems to be in good company, seeing that in recent years, civil resistance against autocratization has become less effective. As illustrated in Graph 4, the success rate of nonviolent maximalist campaigns worldwide has dropped, albeit still way more effective than violent campaigns that aim to bring down governments. It seems that many regimes have become more skilled in anticipating and thwarting civil resistance movements. Moreover, they were able to turn Covid-19 restrictions to their advantage—from keeping crowds off the streets to the extreme case of Brazil where lock-down mechanisms allowed the government to pinpoint the locations of activists and take them in. In Indonesia, COVID-19 presented an opportunity for the parliament—in cahoots with the government—to pass the Omnibus Law in 2020, which introduction in 2019 was met by countrywide mass demonstrations. While most movements in Indonesia and worldwide seem to still overly rely on mass demonstrations, less and less saw the participation of at least 3.5% of the population, which is the critical threshold for an effective campaign (Chenoweth 2020).

Graph 4. Success Rates of Violent and Nonviolent Mass Campaigns (1930-2019)
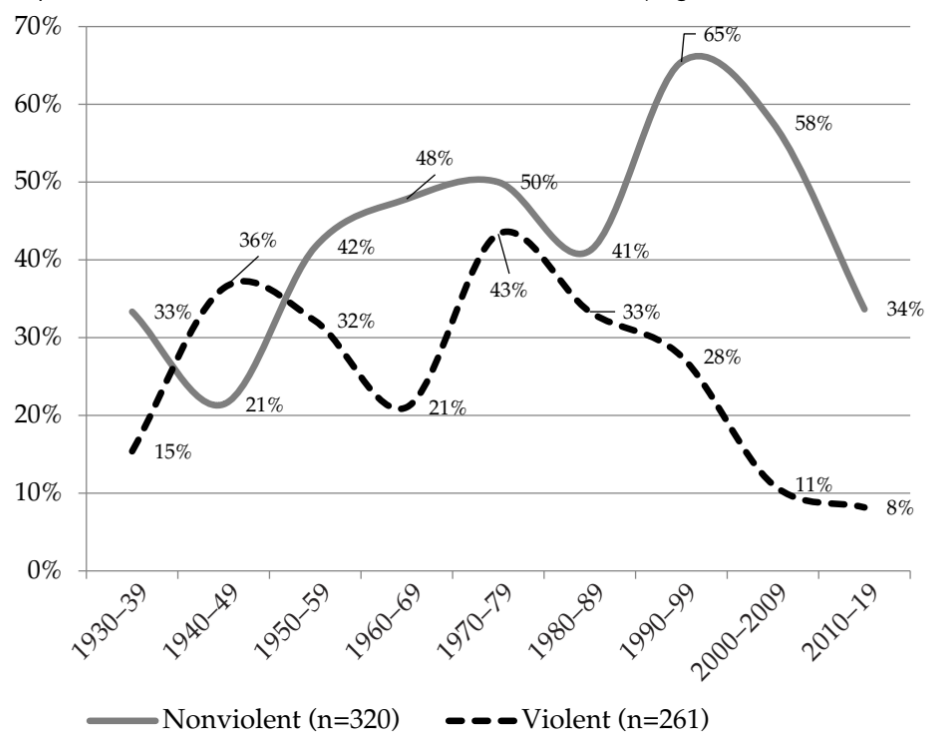
Source: Chenoweth 2020, p. 75

Local Conceptions: The Pluriverse of Civic Spacetime

Often, the ubiquity of the term "civic space" leads to a notion that everyone knows what it means and agrees on said meaning. We intentionally demurred from this assumption and found a more nuanced understanding of the concept.

Granted, many CSAs in Indonesia employ a working definition of civic space akin to that of the United Nations' (UN), "the environment that enables civil society to participate meaningfully in the political, economic, social, and cultural life of our societies" and that of CIVICUS', "the respect in law, policy and practice for freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression and the extent to

which states protect these basic rights." [Lokataru Foundation](#) (henceforth Lokataru) takes on CIVICUS' definition as a basis to map out the three dimensions as to where Indonesia's civic space has been shrinking: (a) the rights of association, (b) the rights to peaceful assembly, and (c) the rights to freedom of association. [Pusat Studi Hukum dan Kebijakan](#) (PSHK) collapses these three and adds two more dimensions, resulting in the triad of (a) freedom of expression, association, and assembly, (b) right to participate, and (c) safety of individuals who speak up on behalf of public interests.

As Lokataru and PSHK take on civic space as "*ruang gerak*" (maneuvering space), Safenet specifically delves into "*ruang digital*" (digital space), while [Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Jakarta](#) (LBH Jakarta) and [Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria](#) (KPA) expand the concept to include "*ruang hidup*" (living space). [Damai Pangkal Damai](#) (DPD) underlines the need to see civic space as "*ruang kontestasi*" (contestation space). [PurpleCode Collective](#) points at how those spaces overlap with our "*ruang privat*" (private space) that needs depatriarchalizing, while [Koalisi Advokasi Kebebasan Beragama](#) reminds us how diversity and dissent have been dealt with through the logic of "*kerukunan-turned-perukunan*" (from harmony to majoritarian harmony), both underlining at the need to look into the more hidden transcripts of repression.

Echoing the above views, a number of respondents put forward several indicators of a healthy civic space: not just vibrant civic activities, but also strong anti-military/militarization attitudes; not just the presence of dissent, but also the absence of fear in expressing dissent; not just the freedom to make decisions, but also the ability to make informed decisions; not just the confidence in expressing one's own voice, but also solidarity in amplifying voices of others; not just openness of both actual and digital spaces, but also their interlinkage, in the sense that resistance in either space translates well into the other.

Our interviews confirm our previous observations that important pillars of civil society have become overwhelmed by seemingly normal everyday processes: students compete against one another to get internships and/or scholarships to study abroad (among others, through the government's Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka/MBKM schemes), lecturers struggle to not perish by drowning themselves in publications, consultancy jobs, and administrative tasks (among others, by meeting various SISTER-DIKTI requirements designed by the Ministry of Education), NGOs juggle new registration procedures and contracting funds on top of day-to-day programming and reporting (among others, to comply to a revision to the law), while journalists maneuver the shift from print to digital media (among others, keeping up with updates in digital security).

Here, we find it useful to borrow Einstein's conception and propose the idea of "civic spacetime." In doing so, we pay attention not only on the contraction of maneuvering, digital, living, contestation, and private spaces, but also the diminution of the time to invest in and take care of those spaces. The problem is then not as simple as CSAs losing the space they need to push back against autocratization, but also CSAs losing substantial time (and energy) to do so. As elaborated in the next section, perhaps it is precisely our blind spot of the time dimension that has allowed autocrats to slowly creep into civic spaces.

Main Strategies and Tactics: The Authoritarian Playbook

Democratic decline in Indonesia has been, as specified by Mietzner ([2024](#), p.13), "elite-controlled, regime-preserving, and socially tolerable." We figure that the ways in which Indonesian elites shrunk civic spacetime can be collated according to the seven strategies listed in The Authoritarian Playbook, a publication by [Protect Democracy](#). We find all seven strategies played by the government, particularly the one holding power in 2014-2024. While some strategies may be more

prevalent than others, they do reinforce one another. As can be seen below, not all of the autocratization strategies prevailed, thanks to robust resistance by CSAs. Given the limited scope of this report, we provide only a selective and quick taste of each autocratization strategy, mostly focusing on national-level politics, leaving out nuanced local dynamics.

Politicizing Independent Institutions. The shrinking of Indonesia's civic spacetime is anchored at the politicization of several independent institutions. Arguably, the biggest blow was the one directed towards Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi (the Corruption Eradication Commission, henceforth KPK). The 2019 revision of KPK Law led to the absurd dismissal of nearly 60 of KPK's most dedicated staff, following years of attempts to smear KPK as having been infiltrated by Islamists. Obviously, public trust towards KPK plummeted, which somewhat affected confidence towards Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia (National Commission on Human Rights, henceforth Komnas HAM), Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan (National Commission on Violence Against Women, henceforth Komnas Perempuan), and the Ombudsman. Our respondents shared that, among CSAs, confidence towards Komnas HAM fluctuates depending on the case and the commissioner assigned to the case. Some noted that Komnas HAM and the Ombudsman have not been allies to SOGIESC minorities. As for Komnas Perempuan, what looms heavily amongst activists is not its integrity, but rather its limited mandate and power.

One tactic that directly impacted CSAs was the 2017 government regulation to amend the Organisasi Kemasyarakatan (societal organizations, henceforth Ormas) Law, under the pretext of safeguarding against Islamist movements. Since this very regulation serves as their legal basis for operating in Indonesia, many NGOs got buried into hefty paperwork and lengthy procedures to meet the new planning, funding, and reporting requirements. These include international NGOs having to "end" their operation in Indonesia, only to get "reborn" as local NGOs. This tactic falls under what [Transnational Institute](#) calls philanthropic protectionism, which overwhelms and constrains CSOs at many fronts, including on receiving international funding.

Around the same time, the government managed to secure the support of most media enterprises. Three media oligarchs got themselves—or family members—positions in a number of ministries, leading to friendly coverage of the president, with approval ratings mostly in the 70s and high 60s (Mietzner [2024](#), Muhtadi & Muslim [2024](#)).

The government also made attempts to draw Muslim organizations into its orbit, most recently in 2024 by issuing a regulation that allows religious organizations to get mining concessions. With only a slight moment of hesitation, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's two biggest (and rivalrous) Muslim organizations went on to acquire the concession. This puts environment and climate activists in a wait-and-see mode, if the two organizations can be embraced as allies. More recently, the government signalled that universities may also acquire mining concessions.

Spreading Disinformation. It is safe to say that the Indonesian government has not engaged in wide-spread and systematic disinformation akin to that of the United States about who won its 2020 election. It is also safe to say that the reason for this may have to do with the vibrant anti-hoax movements, spearheaded by CSAs like Masyarakat Anti-Fitnah Indonesia (Indonesian Anti-Slander Society, henceforth MAFINDO) and Jaringan Pegiat Literasi Digital (Network of Digital Literacy Activists, henceforth Japelidi).

Nevertheless, it is concerning that the most obvious spread of disinformation in Indonesia has to do with the labeling of CSAs as Islamists (Taliban, Hizbut Tahrir, kadrun/desert lizards, etc.), leftists (communist, anarcho, etc.), unpatriotic (pro-West, anti-Indonesia, traitor, etc.), or immoral (infidel, blasphemous, ungodly, etc.). Our respondents recalled how NGO workers were labelled Taliban-defenders when defending KPK and labelled Islamists when rejecting the revision of Ormas Law.

This prompted a general sentiment among CSAs to not get associated with Islamist movements, eventually leading them to see the cost of taking on hefty paperwork and lengthy procedures as worth it. As labels, "Islamist" has been mainly directed towards political oppositions, whereas "anarcho" towards the youth. Meanwhile, the labels "pro-West" and "anti-Indonesia" have been directed towards NGOs and communities receiving international funding, compounded with a narrative that said funds are tools for foreign intervention. The morally loaded labels, usually directed to religious and SOGIESC minorities, have been the most hateful, significantly heightening corporeal and digital security risks of gender and sexually diverse persons. Once labelled with any of the above, individuals and organizations would have to spend a substantial amount of time (and energy) to access safety measures available to them—ranging from cowering in a shelter to fighting back at court. However they choose to respond, the civic spacetime closes in on them. The weight of all these labels attest to how powerful the president's buzzers have been. A number of journalists, including a couple of editors-in-chief, pointed at the systematic recruitments of content creators and social media personas to support pro-regime views.

Aggrandizing Executive Power. Throughout the last administration, there have been grand attempts to strengthen presidential/executive power as well as limit checks and balances. During his first term, the president was backed by only a few parties, which altogether do not form a majority in the parliament. However, in his second term, he managed to build a big-tent coalition, securing an 82% supermajority in parliament. This tactic effectively stripped the parliament off its check and balances role, allowing for contentious and problematic pieces of legislation and regulations to pass. Also taking in parties that do not meet the parliamentary threshold, the coalition stifles any chances of extra parliamentary political forces to emerge. The government also attempted to meddle into the remaining opposition party's internal affairs. In 2021, the president's chief of staff tried to take over one of only two remaining opposition parties—while this attempt ultimately failed, it weakened the party and its oversight role (Mietzner 2024, p. 4).

With overwhelming parliamentary support, the president launched Proyek Strategis Nasional (National Strategic Projects, henceforth PSN). It allowed for development projects to fast track environmental and social impact assessments as well as overwrite local zoning regulations (Verico et al. 2023, Infid 2024, p. 44). First regulated in 2016, more than 200 projects, including roads, airports, harbors, train lines, dams, energy plants, etc. have been designated as PSN by 2018. While the building of infrastructures has been praised by some, research shows many PSN faced significant resistance from affected communities and were linked to human rights violations (Herwati & Wunkana 2023, Jong 2020, Infid 2024). The president's populist and neoliberal development agenda was cemented through the 2020 Cipta Kerja (Job Creation, henceforth Omnibus) Law. Strongly opposed by large segments of CSAs, this piece of legislation led to significant weakening of environmental and labor protections.

Moving into his second term, there was a rumor that the president would want a third term or postpone the 2024 elections (Setijadi 2021, Mietzner 2024). The sentiment was met by resistance by the public, the ruling elite, and his own party. While not able to assert more executive power at the national level, the president did so at the local level, in the form of appointing 20 acting governors, as well as 182 acting mayors and regents, between 2021 and 2023. Despite the Ombudsman flagging instances of administrative malpractice, the appointments stood.

Quashing Criticism and Dissent. This tactic is the most straightforward in terms of shrinking civic spacetime, mostly through attacks on activists. Kemitraan reports that between 2014 and 2023, there were 1,019 cases of threats or attacks against human rights defenders—including activists, journalists, and students, impacting 5,475 of them. These include 243 physical assaults (dominant throughout the first half of the time frame), 197 judicial harassments (dominant in the second half of the time frame), 149 evictions or disbandments, 146 terrors and threats, and 140 digital attacks—with

a caveat that some cases are listed under more than one category. Over 2,600 cases revolve around the issue of Papua, which in itself includes issues pertaining to human rights violations, mining, deforestation, and land-grabbing.

Those at the receiving end of physical assaults and judicial harassment are mostly activists working on the issues of human rights, indigenous rights, land-grabbing, and environment. While activists are also prone to terror and threats as well as digital attacks, journalists and academics make up a good proportion of this category. According to Amnesty International Indonesia, especially vulnerable are journalists covering remote regions, covering corruption, environmental, and mining issues, as well as covering cases where the state or big corporations have a heavy hand. In academia, the quelling is done through discrediting research and opinions that are critical towards the government, banning research and discussions on certain topics, and criminalization of research finding under the pretext of defamation. In the workplace, another common tactic is union busting. As reported by Lokataru, this usually involves instigating internal conflicts and bribing those on the unions' leadership.

As for the quashing of mass demonstrations, PSHK notes three sequential modes: sweeping and arrests of student activists by police prior to the event, the use of excessive force and armaments during the event, and arrests of those who participated in the demonstrations after the event. In certain cases, there are even directives to shoot on sight, sometimes leading to extrajudicial killings, such as the case of Gijik.

In the digital sphere, the main tool for cracking down on criticism and dissent has been the Informasi dan Transaksi Elektronik (information and electronic transactions, henceforth ITE) Law, especially its anti-defamation clause. Amnesty International Indonesia argues that the establishment of "Virtual Police," had allowed for a rigorous enforcement of this law, among others, through digital surveillance. There have also been attempts to pressure platforms to block or remove content, to throttle internet bandwidth, and even to shut down the internet altogether for a period of time. In a more individually targeted mode, activists and journalists got their accounts hacked, experienced doxxing, and/or received online gender-based violence.

Meanwhile, an underrated tactic is creating physical distances, sometimes under the guise of gentrification. In Jakarta, protesters are no longer allowed to stand on the pavement just outside the gates of the presidential palace. An "aspiration garden" was built across the road, pulling back the frontline by 50 meters—and even more, most demonstrations were granted a space that is blocks away, at Patung Kuda. One can argue that moving the nation's capital to Nusantara, at the heart of Kalimantan is a way to distance protesters from the presidential palace—a strategy that reminded one respondent of how the main campus of University of Indonesia was moved from downtown Jakarta to the suburbs of Depok.

Scapegoating Vulnerable and Marginalized Community. This circles back to the strategy of spreading disinformation. Arguably, throughout the last decade, it is the Islamists who have been constantly and systematically put at the receiving end of this. Since some who are affiliated with Islamist ideologies do target other groups, including transpersons, Tionghoas (Indonesians with Chinese descent), and Shias, there was very little solidarity from CSAs when Islamist groups were targeted by the state (Petz 2021, Mietzner 2024).

It is important to remember that there is a long-standing culture of discrimination against SOGIESC diverse persons, Tionghoas, Papuans, and a number of indigenous, religious, and ethnic minorities. More recently, we also see anti-Rohingya sentiments in Aceh, as they come to seek refuge. While we have not seen the rise of communal violence akin to that of in the late 1990s and early 2000s, we see that bureaucrats and security apparatus often fail to protect vulnerable and marginalized

communities. That said, although the strategy has been fortunately underplayed, there is always a chance that autocrats would gear up on this strategy, seeing that CSAs do not always rise up in solidarity with the scapegoated.

Corrupting Elections. Throughout the last two decades, there have been efforts to take away direct voting. The earliest of this attempt was in 2014, when the executive and legislative tried to pass a law that governors and mayors should no longer be voted by the people but appointed by the local legislators. The pushback against this was massive and successful, yet discussions on the matter resurfaced in 2018 and 2024. While gubernatorial and mayoral elections remain to be at the hands of voters, the president did manage to appoint over 200 acting regional heads.

The most phenomenal move to date to corrupt elections is arguably the 2023 Constitutional Court's decision to amend candidates' minimum age limit, allowing the son of the two-time president to join the race, eventually landing the vice presidential seat. This was not a stand-alone tactic. With vote-gathering efforts from the appointed acting regional heads and *ad hoc* disbursements of social security funds, victory was sealed for the president's son. Not only was a political dynasty born, but the New Order political dynasty also saw a comeback, with the 32-year-long dictator's former son in-law elected as president, despite having gross human rights violation records. The saga continues with the Supreme Court's attempt to amend the minimum age limit for gubernatorial elections that would allow for the younger son of said president to join the gubernatorial race. This time around, the Constitutional Court overruled the attempt, following massive demonstrations across the country, bringing thousands to the street, and more engaging in digital activism.

Stoking Violence. Perhaps the most obvious within this strategy is police's use of excessive force. Here, [KontraS](#) provides a detailed account of how police violence rose within the last five years, especially in responding to demonstrations or in disbanding crowds.

Equally worrisome is the rise of violence by non-state actors, many of them done at the local level. This includes morality policing in the provinces of Aceh and West Java, vigilantism against transpersons and Christians in Yogyakarta, eviction of people from their land by thugs who were hired by corporations, "PAM Swakarsa online" (online vigilantism) that harasses activists online, and such. As noted in several reports, such acts have been condoned by the police, i.e., by letting or following up on the persecutions, as well as by institutionalizing private justice through the 2020 Police Regulation on PAM Swakarsa. Jaffrey ([2020](#), [2021](#)) concurs and elaborates how anti-minority vigilantism has largely been tolerated by the local and national government, and to a certain extent by the people. She explains that Indonesia's pluralist constitution has made it difficult to curtail minority rights through top-down legislation, and therefore vigilantism emerges as an appealing extra-legal strategy for undermining these rights from the bottom up (Jaffrey [2021](#), p. 245).

Although it follows the global trends and The Authoritarian Playbook, there is nothing "automatic" about Indonesia's third wave of autocratization. Such a process cannot be delinked from how the third wave of democratization played out in the 1998 Reformasi (the fall of the New Order regime and the beginning of Indonesia's transition to democracy). A number its agendas were not totally met—security sector reform, redress for human rights violation, dismantling patronage politics, building credible oppositions, lustration, land reform, social justice for Papua, to name a few. Incrementally, such shortcomings allowed for elite-recycling, resulting in elite-driven autocratization. Thus, any current attempts to pushback against shrinking civic spacetime and to promote democracy need to include fail-safe mechanisms to prevent the future relapse towards autocratization.

Given how dire the situation has become, the CDA sequence–connect, defend, act–seems to make sense. It even translates to a viable theory of change: if CSAs are connected to one another, and if they are empowered to defend against digital and holistic threats, then they will be able to act together and effectively in pushing back against the shrinking of civic spacetime.

Nevertheless, we would like to encourage a lateral and/or nonlinear reading of CDA. Our interviews suggested that many CSAs simply acted upon seeing an opportunity or defended against a threat. It is this very choice of acting or defending that raised their visibility, allowing them to get connected to others. Some respondents reflected that their constant "act" of voicing certain concerns may have deterred others from attacking them, in a way serving as "the best defense." A number of our SOGIESC diverse respondents shared that for them, the sequence was closer to defense-connect-act. They shared that many amongst them, especially poor transwomen, tend to not have choices other than to continuously defend themselves. As their individual efforts gained visibility, they were able to connect to one another, as well as to more established NGOs and communities. While many eventually join acts to promote SOGIESC rights, some transwomen see that–necessarily and appropriately so–the heavy lifting should be performed by established NGOs.


Key Takeaways:
- Indonesia's shrinking civic space takes place within the third wave of autocratization. Since they need it to gain and hold on to power, autocrats erode democracy at a very slow pace, putting civil society in a boiling frog syndrome.
- Inspired by Einstein's conception of spacetime, we emphasize not only the shrinking of various civic spaces—the maneuvering, digital, contestation, private, etc. spaces—but also the limited time CSAs have to engage with and maintain these spaces. Everyday pressures and demands on civil society, including students, NGOs, journalists, and educators, distract them from effectively pushing back against autocratization.
- All seven strategies from The Authoritarian Playbook are at play in Indonesia, to varying degrees. The most straightforward is quashing criticism and dissent; the most successful is the politicizing of independent institutions; the nearly successful is corrupting election.
- While the CDA sequence of connect, defend, act makes sense, we suggest looking at it laterally. In some cases, taking action or defending can increase visibility and only later on foster connections with others.

Connect

Who do we mean by CSAs? Where do they stand *vis a vis* each other? What allows them to, or bars them from, connecting to one another? In our attempt to map out respondents' understanding of their ecosystem, we utilize the Spectrum of Allies. This framework divides actors into five categories depending on how close they are to our position: active allies, passive allies, neutral, passive opponents, and active opponents. Active allies are those who agree with us and are fighting with us; passive allies are those who agree with us but not act upon it; neutral actors are those sitting on the bench and do not engage; passive allies are those who disagree with us but do not try to stop us; active opposition are the real opponents, those who disagree with us and are trying to stop us. Borrowed from nonviolent resistance studies, it puts forward a logic that activism is about, amongst others, bringing actors closer to our position, our side of the spectrum. Without securing enough support, it would be difficult for us to achieve our goal. Also, without attempting to secure enough support, there is a chance that actors will move closer to our opponents' position. For instance, passive allies retreat to become neutral actors, or neutral actors warm up to our opponents' rhetorics, turning them into passive or active opponents themselves.

Graph 5. Spectrum of Allies
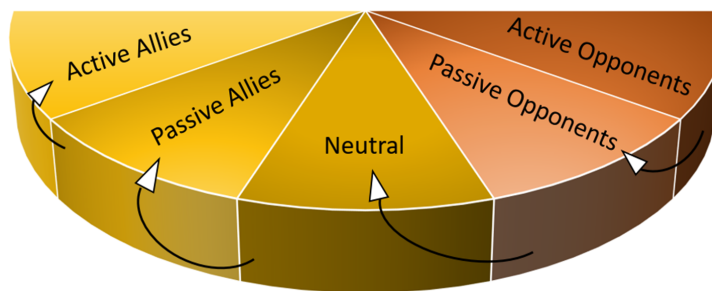
Modified from: Boyd & Mitchell (2012)

As shown in number of research (Alinsky 1971; Popovic 2007; Boyd 2012), there is a danger that activists and social movements become insular, living in their own bubble, meaning that they only engage with active allies. To a certain extent, even passive allies are seen as not worth enough to join the fight. Another danger is for activists and social movements to see the four other positions outside active allies as active opponents, thus highly overestimating the support that opponents actually have.

Throughout our interviews, we try to gauge how CSAs map their ecosystem in terms of active opponents, passive opponents, neutral, passive allies, and active allies. We found quite a narrow sets of actors being mapped. We organize our observations along these four themes: the variances across civic spacetime(s), the need to bring in more actors, cohesion of CSAs, and the urgency to center Papua.

Variances across Civic Spacetime(s)

It is virtually impossible, and definitely reductionist, to try to construct a singular Spectrum of Allies for all CSAs in Indonesia. It is obvious that a national-level map would not resonate with those at the local level, let alone local maps with one another. In Yogyakarta for example, SOGIESC communities see local human rights NGOs and most local journalists as their active allies, whereas SOGIESC communities in Padang often find local human rights NGOs as their passive allies, sometimes even becoming passive enemies, not unlike local journalists and NGOs working on the issue of religious freedom. Our respondent mentioned that in West Sumatra, only LBH Padang reached the highest level of allyship, in the sense that it accepts SOGIESC diverse persons as those whose human rights are worth protecting. They said that many human rights defenders in their region would be reluctant to publicly take sides with SOGIESC diverse persons, especially when this group is under attack. The reasons vary from lack of gender justice perspectives, to conservative interpretations of religion, to stigmas pertaining to HIV and AIDS.

Maps also look different across sectors, between human rights movements, SOGIESC circles, industrial conflicts, religious freedom, etc. For example, students may be seen as active allies by human rights movements, but are often seen as neutral or passive opponents by taxi bike drivers when they take to the streets to demand their fair share of income from ride-hailing companies.

Mindful of diversities across CSAs, the annual Indonesia Civil Society Forum (ICSF) recently changed its format from a singular national event that brings together hundreds of CSOs from across the nation to one that is preceded by a series of regional gatherings, each bringing together CSOs from the "East" (Sulawesi, Maluku, Papua, and the southeast islands), from Sumatra and Kalimantan, as well as from Java and Bali. Many respondents appreciated such reorganization seeing that it allowed for "*isu khas wilayah*" (specific regional issues) to be identified and reported back at the national level. The ITE Law was heavily discussed in the Java-Bali and Sumatra-Kalimantan regional meetings. The two regional meetings also highlighted the marginalization of SOGIESC diverse persons and persons with disabilities, leading to specific recommendations for organizing training on gender equality, disability, and inclusion (GEDI). Meanwhile, what stood out from the East regional meeting were the issues of internet connectivity that is susceptible to throttling and shut down by the government, human rights violations towards specific groups of people especially indigenous Papuans (Orang Asli Papua), and natural resource conflicts particularly those involving mining industries.

Nevertheless, a number of ICSF participants, as well as a third of our respondents, noticed how time limitation compelled participants at the national meeting to prioritize the top four issues. While acknowledging the need to manage time efficiently, they found that such prioritization eventually undid the earlier regional problem identification processes, sidelining issues such as human rights in Papua, climate crisis in small islands and coastal areas, economic development, a focus on feminism, etc. A particular comment was, "*Aktivisme di Papua tidak sampai ke Jakarta*" (activism in Papua did not reach Jakarta). Perhaps, one way forward is to reposition the national meeting as a forum where regional issues get centered and discussed by the wider CSA ecosystem rather than a forum where regional issues get compiled—which in doing so, said issues get decentered. This means there are dedicated sessions or days for each of the regions—East, Sumatra-Kalimantan, and Java Sumatra, in this particular order—where regional issues are discussed as common concerns, in the spirit of intersectional, intersectoral, and interregional solidarity.

The More, The Safer

When we invited respondents to identify the various actors that make up Indonesia's civil society, the recurring answers we got were NGO workers, LBH staff, and journalists. Most respondents expressed frustration on how it has been the same and limited crowd again and again, both at the national and local levels. A youth activist confided their disappointment towards the NGO community that such problem gets relegated as "lack of communication strategy," when the problem is deeper than that. Seeing that our respondents agreed that more actors need to be pulled in, we pushed them a bit more to think of who might be called into the "save civic spacetime" lineup.

Half of our respondents pointed out how blue-collar workers have been one of the oldest allies in pro-democracy movements. They reflected how relationships with said workers need to be re-established and widened to include gig workers and domestic workers. CSAs need to be more explicit in standing for workers' rights, i.e. by speaking out against union busting, attending workers' rallies, or at least sharing in social media sympathetic opinions on such rallies (instead of complaining how the streets become congested or services were halted because workers went to demonstrations or strikes). Meanwhile, some respondents suggested that a more realistic way to bring in white collar workers would be through asking them to contribute financially, in lieu of them usually not being able to physically attend picketing and marches.

Some respondents underlined the need to bring in educators. In addition to having their wellbeing deprioritized again and again over other development agendas, more and more teachers have been choked by debts and are at the receiving end of violence by law enforcers. Teaching and nonteaching staff at universities too have been facing economic hardship. Forced to juggle multiple jobs and/or projects to sustain their lives and families, the time and energy they have for instilling critical thinking and a healthy sense of civic duty to their students shrink significantly. Here, the civic spacetime closes in without autocrats having to necessarily curb academic freedom.

A couple of respondents noted how health workers have become "slightly radicalized" post Covid-19. Being at the frontline of a massive health crisis, they got pulled out from the comfort that their profession previously provided and got exposed to the social injustices associated with caregiving. CSAs need to seize the opportunity and bring this sector in, while being mindful of the diversity within—especially that of class and gender.

There is a mixed sentiment towards religious institutions. A few respondents underlined the need to fraternize mosque and church communities. Their wide reach would allow campaigns to spread messages more efficiently, while their reputation would shield campaigns from being stigmatized. Others raised their doubts given that some religious communities have shown misogynist and homophobic attitudes, as well as a penchant for benefiting from mining concessions. An important religious network whom all respondents find as an active ally is Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (Indonesia Women Ulama Congress, henceforth KUPI). Amongst others, they have been offering feminist and inclusive interpretations of the Quran, which allows individuals and communities—especially marginalized ones—to counter the various discriminatory views against them. Another growing network with potentials for intersectional solidarity is Koalisi Kebebasan Beragama dan Berkeyakinan (Coalition for Religious Freedom, henceforth KBB).

Rather surprisingly, respondents were not quick to mention undergraduate and high school students, albeit undergraduate students sometimes making up most of the crowd in mass demonstrations and that high school students, mostly from vocational schools, have started to join demonstrations and have grabbed media attention. Some mentioned that undergraduate students spend only 4-5 years at universities, with their first and last years dedicated more seriously to their

studies, meaning that a lot of time and effort would have to be dedicated to constantly recruit, mentor, and organize new batches of students. Others mentioned that students have become more occupied with enrolling to exchange programs with foreign universities, applying for internships at big corporations or government institutions, or getting high GPAs, meaning that there is not much time, or even interest, from the students' side anyway. Respondents agreed that there needs to be a more systematic approach to link students to social justice movements. Here, NGOs can provide internship schemes for Social and Political Sciences students, while LBHs can engage Law students in preparing court cases. In general, movements can invite students of Medicine and Psychology to help provide first aid and mental health support, students of Letter and Communication Science to help with copy-writing and public outreach, and students of Engineering and Computer Science to help with enhancing digital security. Efforts to link students up need to be done in a more intentional and systematic manner. One way would be by integrating the above into courses and/or by turning MBKM (a government initiative that allows students to formally access learning facilities outside of their campus) on its head, from a system that fast tracks students into the corporate world to one that facilitates meaningful engagement of students into social justice work.

Moving on to the more general group that makes students: youth. Exit interviews show that 71% of Gen Z and 60% of Millennials voted for the 2024 president elect (Ulya & Rastika 2024). In a way, it this attests to how the government has managed to pull in many, if not most, youth to become their active allies despite the government's superficial, patronizing, and youth-washing ways of engaging with young people, as criticized by many youth organizations. A couple of respondents underlined the need to build capacities of young people in rural areas in a way that would allow them to remain or return to their villages, not feeling the need to move to the cities for better opportunities. Some suggested that the way to bring in youth into the spectrum is through hobby-based or fandom-based clubs.

Speaking of clubs, a number of respondents saw it ripe to bring in football supporters and online gamers. Both groups were aggrieved by state repression—excessive policing at the Kanjuruhan Stadium that led to the death of 131 football spectators and suspension of some gaming platforms.

Nearly all respondents pointed at the need to collaborate with artists, stand-up comedians, and social media influencers. They see that such individuals would help campaigns gain traction, as well as counter the celebrity-trodden government's opinion-shaping machines.

Seeing how certain groups are prone to being scapegoated, such as Tionghoas, Papuans, and SOGIESC diverse persons, bringing them in as allies could be a way of performing our duty of care. If they are well interlinked with many CSAs, they would have extra layers of protection in the sense that many in the civil society would not buy into the disinformation and incitement of violence targeted against these groups.

With the executive and legislative seemingly in cahoots when it comes to redistributing political seats and development projects, it is important that judges not get pulled in as their allies. The 2024 series of strikes and demonstrations by judges opened up an opportunity for CSAs to make sure that judges remain in the neutral zone, or even become allies in social justice struggles.

To close this section on a high note, hats off to young climate activists. Compared to other groups, they seem to be the most intentional in brokering cross-sectoral solidarity. Their campaigns, especially on social media, skilfully frame human rights, women's rights, SOGIESC rights, indigenous rights, religious freedom, land-grabbing, Omnibus Law, and such, as climate justice issues. Also, their adept in threading local, national, regional, transnational, and global perspectives allows them to network widely.

Stronger Cohesion

Salient amongst respondents is a notion of national-local divide. They underline that what is pressing in Jakarta is not necessarily the most pressing in other regions. Yet, they feel as if there is always a stronger pull for local CSAs to support whatever is going on at the national level. Or, when national NGOs implement programs or activities outside of Jakarta, local CSAs are expected to rally to their support, which consumes time and energy. Also, they see how national issues eat up most of public attention, making it more difficult for local issues, especially from rural and remote parts of the country, to get heard, let alone receive substantial public support.

Within regions, the lack of cohesion may come from competition amongst those working on the same issues, or from "*ego sektoral*" amongst those working on different issues. Half of our respondents provide illustrations on how NGOs feel pressured to compete with one another for funding or how journalists are compelled to compete over fellowship opportunities. They also discuss how difficult it has been to bring in NGOs outside their issue to support their work, sometimes underlining that everyone is already stretched thin working on their own issue, not having the "bandwidth" of taking on more.

A number of our respondents find the problem to be more ideological and having more to do with a lack of commitment to intersectionality. In particular, one journalist shared that not every media outlet is willing to shoulder the duty of collective care and to lend privilege to others who have less. Fearing the risk of losing audience and/or readers, even media deemed as "progressive" sometimes prefer to play it safe by not explicitly siding with women and SOGIESC diverse persons. Meanwhile, some respondents argue that the lack of cohesion among CSAs has more to do with the lack of class consciousness. They mention how NGO workers, academics, and other white-collar workers shy away from seeing themselves as "*buruh*" (labor), thus failing to ally themselves with, and find allies among, blue collar workers, gig workers, farmers, fisherpersons, and such.

Picking up from the studies of ethnic relations, it is important to make sure that cohesiveness amongst CSAs are more bridging than bonding. "Bridging" refers to interactions and social capitals that bring together people of different ethnic, religious, class, age, etc. backgrounds, while "bonding" has to do with those that tie together people from similar identity backgrounds (Varshney [2002](#)). Also, such bridging connections need to be cultivated both at the everyday quotidian and the formal associational levels. While cross cleavage interactions do not guarantee that different groups will understand and agree with each other, they help prevent intergroup violence in the event of conflicts, misunderstandings, as well as misinformation, disinformation, and provocations.

Centering Papua

Looking at a [2002](#) report by Universitas Gadjah Mada and Harvard University, we find it devastating that its recommendations are still very much relevant to this date, meaning that not much have changed over the two decades. Yet, from a superficial level, one may get an idea that much have improved, i.e. in terms of infrastructure and governance, especially through *pemekaran daerah*—that is, the splitting provinces or districts into smaller administrative units.

Currently wrapping up a research on the matter, Papuan Democratic Institute generously shared with us some previews from their upcoming report (2025). They underline that since its integration to Indonesia, there has formally never been any civic space in Papua—although such spaces opened up a bit in 1999-2000, which Chauvel refers to as Papuan Spring. The militaristic approach to integration that has turned Papua into a Daerah Operasi Militer (Military Operation Zone) left no

space for civil society. Papua's integration to Indonesia is very different to that of experienced by other regions, in the sense that from the very start, Papua's encounter with Indonesia is militaristic. Here, Papuan Democratic Institute prompts us to rethink if the concept of shrinking civic space is applicable to Papua.

On *pemekaran daerah*, our respondents pointed how it failed to fulfil its promise to bring public services closer to the people. They underlined how the program actually led to further entrenchments of civic spacetime in Papua. On top of taking over unceded territories, the program became a legal basis for taking over the biodiversity and its management from indigenous communities. At different levels, CSAs became compelled to dedicate enormous time to navigate the "governing/administrative" spaces resulting in *pemekaran daerah*—some spend their energy defending the program, some spend their energy defending against the program, others spend their energy turning the government-led program to benefit the civil society.

Key Takeaways:
- Given how diverse Indonesia's civic spacetimes are, it is important that Spectrum of Allies are mapped in various circles, be it region-based, issue-based, or coalition-based.
- The pro-democracy movement should bring in more actors, beyond the usual suspects. These include workers (including in the education and health sectors), students, youth, artists, etc. Active brokering and alliance building should be more bridging than bonding, and should foster intersectional solidarity.
- Several factors that may have led to the lack of cohesion among CSAs are national-local divide (where national issues overshadow local concerns), competition for resources, a lack of gender justice perspectives, a lack of commitment to intersectionality, and a lack of class consciousness.
- Any attempts to pushback against autocratization need to center Papua. It should not be deprioritized under the guise of "once democracy is restored, it would be easier to facilitate social justice aspirations in Papua."

Defend

What have CSAs done to push back against shrinking civic spacetime? What allows them to, or bars them from, doing so effectively? In our attempt to map out respondents' understanding of their strategies and capacities, we utilize Points of Intervention. This framework delineates the six places in a system as to where CSAs can interrupt the functioning of the system: point of production, point of destruction, point of consumption, point of decision, point of assumption, and point of opportunity as elaborated by Reinsborough and Canning ([2017]) below.

The point of production is where goods are produced, including factories and farms. The point of destruction is where resources are extracted and/or physical violence is enacted, including forests and mines. The point of consumption is where goods are purchased and services are provided, including shops, markets, and counters. The point of decision is where power holders sit to make decisions, including the presidential palace, parliament buildings, courtrooms, and company headquarters. The point of assumption is where the dominant narrative and perceived legitimacy of the opponent lies, including ideologies, curricula, and popular culture artifacts. Lastly, the point of opportunity is where the calendar presents unique opportunities to draw attention to the cause, including commemorative dates, scheduled visits by a significant figure, or holidays. Borrowed from nonviolent resistance studies, it puts forward a logic that activism is about, amongst others, pushing our opponents' buttons where it matters most.

Graph 6. Points of Intervention

Source: The Commons Social Change Library 2017

With Points of Intervention in mind, we discuss four important observations: a sparse defense line, an overwhelming full time side job, the need to step up the good fight, and several capacity building needs.

A Sparse Defense Line

Looking at the various reports and listening to our respondents intently, we sense that CSAs in Indonesia have mostly focused on the points of decision and points of destruction. Those working on democracy and human rights issues tend to direct their efforts towards the point of decision, staging picketing and demonstrations in front of executive, legislative, and judicial buildings. Also concentrating their efforts at the point of decision are those demanding workers' rights. While organizing rallies at government buildings, factory workers, journalists, teachers, gig workers etc. temporarily vacate the point of production, without necessarily applying pressure there. Meanwhile, those centered at the point of destruction, like villages, farmlands, forests etc., are usually the ones working on environmental issues and against land-grabbing. Putting ourselves in our opponents' shoes, it seems that CSAs' moves, especially on where or which buttons they plan to push, are quite predictable. Thus, it is not a big surprise that protests are easily thwarted.

Digital campaigns have been helpful in intensifying pressure at the point of assumption. #ReformasiDikorupsi (corrupted political reform), #SemuaBisaKena (everyone can fall victim), and #DaruratDemokrasi (democracy under siege) challenge the dominant narratives. Respectively, each underline that the government has been undoing the legacies of the 1998 political reform while claiming to be taking the country to a better place; that the government has been criminalizing innocent people while claiming to be safeguarding the nation against dangerous people; that democratic measures have been hijacked for autocratic agendas while seemingly functioning as usual. DPD, Extinction Rebellion Indonesia, and others have been asserting that nonviolent activism is an expression of love for one's country and a way of performing one's civic duty, not a crime. Perhaps, more fundamentally, what needs to be challenged is the idea that the constitution is there to control citizens, for it is a tool to limit power holders. While most respondents see these discourse (re)shapings as crucial, some feel that the civil society has not managed to effectively counter state narratives aggressively pushed through designated buzzers.

As for the point of opportunity, a number of movements have skilfully made use of it, for example organizing Women's March and International Women's Day commemoration in March, human rights campaigns in September and December, and stoking up demonstrations during state events, such as during G20 meetings in several cities across Indonesia. While the utilization of the point of opportunity may bring more public attention to the issue, unfortunately it also allows for the opponent to better anticipate activists' moves, possibly rendering them ineffective.

It is safe to say that CSAs have been concentrating on the point of decision. In a less cross-sectoral manner, mostly only engaging those directly affected, CSAs are present at the point of destruction. Point of assumption and point of opportunity have not been managed effectively. Rather underutilized are the point of production and point of consumption. Seeing how dependent the regime is to businesses, intervening at these two points are indeed promising. Of course, the million-dollar question is: how do we get CSAs to go beyond point of decision, populate the other five points of intervention, and do so effectively, when they do not have much players to field in the first place? This loops back to the Connect chapter on how we can field more players if we do not have enough imagination on who (else) to field at the first place.

An Overwhelming Full-time Side Job

There is a general frustration among CSAs on the fact that they (we!) have not collectively managed to reverse autocratization in Indonesia. Yet, it should be noted that CSAs have done pretty well in slowing it down. Circling back to The Big Picture chapter, some authoritarian tactics have been

thwarted, including efforts to take away direct voting. Amidst massive and calculated moves from autocrats, CSAs took on the demanding task of defending democracy, on top of already juggling their daily profession as NGO workers, journalists, caregivers, artists, academics, students, religious leaders, community leaders, parents, and such.

In general, we observe five mechanisms as to how CSAs have been pushing for democratic agendas and have defended against autocratization. Going through each mechanism, we begin to see the factors that led to CSAs' successes in slowing autocratization down, as well as those holding them back from being able to stop autocratization altogether.

The first mechanism has to do with the everyday enlivening of civic spacetime. The way we understand it, the quality of civic spacetime is defined and shaped by civil society enlivening the space and dedicating time to it. That said, actors in the civic spacetime already do important civic work simply by integrating it into their profession, by volunteering their time and space for social justice issues, and even by attending civil society activities—including neighborhood meetings, music concerts, picketing, and such. Thus, by keeping on with what they have been doing, CSAs already actively hold a line of defense against autocratization.

Of course, some CSAs engage more directly in actively supporting and defending democracy, such as human rights NGOs and LBHs, as well as those working on issues such as social inclusion, economic rights, and environmental justice. Through advocacy, training, outreach, fundraising, caregiving activities, and such, they already perform the Gramscian "war of position" against autocratic forces, that is, by challenging the hegemony of autocratic actors with their populist and neoliberal narratives.

The second mechanism is to voice democratic agendas to political parties, be it by joining existing ones or forming new ones. While this may be the formal and effective path to further aspirations in most democracies, it has not been fruitful in Indonesia. One main reason is the prevalence of "ideological emptiness" within Indonesia's party system. Here, political parties have mainly become vehicles for politicians and businesspersons to satisfy their aspirations for power, instead of vehicles for promoting ideology- or issue-based aspirations. Despite the emergence of 90+ political parties in Indonesia following the 1998 political reform, we now witness a significant narrowing down, not only in terms of their number, but more importantly in the range of positions that they represent. The fact that most of them are comfortable to enter supermajority coalitions is a testament to the pragmatic, rather than ideological, impulses of parties. Even Partai Buruh (Labor Party) and Partai Solidaritas Indonesia (Indonesian Solidarity Party) that started out with strong issue-based platforms got coaxed into supporting the coalition. This is compounded by active meddling by the executive to aggrandize its power, as illustrated in The Big Picture chapter. It remains to be seen how Partai Hijau (Green Party), which is very much issue-based, can be a viable vehicle for CSAs to promote democratic agendas. A publication by [Pamflet](#) signals quite some trust and hope amongst youth towards Partai Hijau, seing that the party's commitments to green politics were sustained by longstanding activism by Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia (Indonesian Forum for the Environment, henceforth WALHI) and by a governance structure that is flat (heterarchic) and decentralises power (holacracy).

The third mechanism is by joining or consulting for the executive. Seeing that in 2014 the incoming president was considered a self-made political outsider, many CSAs enthusiastically built close ties with the executive, assuming that such rapport would give them a seat at the table, which translates to more effective advocacy. These hopes already started to falter during the president's first term, where little progress in terms of strengthening democracy and dealing with past human rights violations were made. To a certain extent, this led to severed ties amongst CSAs who decided to join the government and those who decided to stay put. With a big-tent coalition, strong alliance with

capital, and populist approaches, the president could afford to go through his second term without much support from CSAs, significantly narrowing down their influence.

The fourth mechanism utilizes judicial mechanisms, from demanding judicial reviews of problematic regulations to charging legal suits against government misconduct. Over the years, one of the small wins gained by CSAs through judicial mechanism is the 2024 nullification of three articles on false news and defamation by the Constitutional Court: Articles 14 and 15 of Law No. 1/1946 on Criminal Law Regulation, and Article 310 Paragraph (1) of the Criminal Code. The legal suit was presented by Haris Azhar, Fatiah Maulidiyanti, YLBH, and AJI on the grounds that they have been (mis)used to criminalize human rights activists, journalists, anti-corruption advocates, and critics of state officials. In the same month, CSAs working in fisheries and maritime issues also claimed another judicial review victory after the Constitutional Court rejected PT Gema Kreasi Perdana (GKP)'s legal suit to repeal articles of the Coastal Areas and Small Islands Management Act (Undang-Undang Pengelolaan Wilayah Pesisir dan Pulau-Pulau Kecil). The Court's ruling set a progressive precedent for CSAs that are actively protecting their ecological spaces and coastal areas, such as Wawonii and Sangihe, from the greed of extractive industries. Rather underutilized, we think more can be done in this path, i.e. by overwhelming opponents' spacetime with court procedures, thus turning judicial harassment tactics on their head.

Lastly is through informal politics, that is, taking to the streets and gadgets to call for changes. As elaborated in a next section, the number of nonviolent resistance and digital activism has risen in the last few years, signalling distrust towards formal politics, especially party politics and joining the executive.

Of the five mechanisms above, the second and third (political parties and joining the government) have proven to be futile. Here, we would like to point at the contrast where autocratic actors erode democracy as part of their full time paid job and CSAs defend democracy on top of their full time job(s). To make it less overwhelming for CSAs, the civic duty of defending against shrinking civic spacetime needs to be shouldered by more people, and spread to the other three mechanisms.

Stepping Up the Good Fight

This section delves into the last of the five mechanisms introduced above, that is, taking to the streets and gadgets. Here, it is important to note that nonviolent resistance is well and alive in Indonesia, both in the digital and the conventional forms. DPD's database records 15,073 acts of nonviolent resistance in Indonesia between 1999 and 2023, while Fajar et.al.'s research identified nearly 3,873 counts of digital activism between 2016 and 2021.

A closer look into the database allows us to see that the repertoires of resistance have been narrow and their intensities have been low. While there are 198 methods of nonviolent action (Sharp 1973), 75% acts of resistance in Indonesia utilize only 10 methods, most of them the "*paket kombo*" (classic combo) of marches, demonstrations, posters, and speeches (DPD 2024). Also, DPD counts that 88% acts of resistance utilize methods of protest and persuasion, where activists "merely" express their support or disagreement, i.e. through demonstrations, petitions, or art performances. Only 4% and 6% utilize, respectively, methods of noncooperation and methods of intervention. Noncooperation consists of methods where activists not just express their disagreement but also pull out participation from the thing they disagree with, i.e. through boycott, strike, and divestment. Meanwhile, intervention consists of methods where activists do not just express disagreement and pull out participation, but actively stop or disrupt the thing they disagree with, i.e. through blockades, occupations, or making alternative systems.

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A similar trend can be observed in digital world, where activists can be categorized as being at the spectator, transitional, or gladiatorial levels (see George and Leidner 2019). Most instances of digital activism identified in Fajar's study fall under the spectator category, where digital activists like or share other people's contents, or produce their own contents. Only a few are in the transitional category, where digital activists organize e-petitions, crowdfunding, buycott and boycotts, and/or perform botivism (the use of automated digital actions). Even fewer are those in the gladiatorial category, where digital activists perform data activism, exposure, or hactivism.

We would like to suggest a framing of the above as "the glass is half full." In doing so, we direct our focus to the many higher-intensity methods that have not been utilized by CSAs. This include unarmed civilian protection (UCP), a method of direct action that has been proved effective in increasing the safety of vulnerable groups (women, children, elderlies, refugees, ethnic and religious minorities, etc.) in the Iraq, Philippines, Sudan, South Sudan, Ukraine, United States, and other parts of the world.

We believe that the utilization of new methods will bring in the surprise factors needed for nonviolent resistance to throw opponents off balance. One potential hurdle would be, as expressed by a number of respondents, is the "*abang-abang*" (elderly brother) phenomenon, where older activists mansplain on how they used to do it back in the day. Another is the "*sopan*" (polite) mentality that many citizens practice against those in power. To this, as mentioned by Asfinawati, we need to focus on "*Etika, bukan etiket*" (ethics, not etiquettes). Politeness needs to be repositioned as a part of ethics of care, of being in solidarity with the oppressed, of demanding accountability from power holders, of taking the high ground in politics—not as reluctance to inflict discomfort, especially among those who have violated ethics of care towards the powerless.

Unarmed Civilian Protection

Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP) is a protection practice led by civilians, for civilians, prioritizing leadership and decision-making by communities themselves. It is practiced by communities, NGOs, and other civil society organisations based on a methodology and set of practices for the direct physical protection of civilians by trained, unarmed civilians before, during, and after violent conflict.

UCP protects civilians from violence through use of a range of methods, including protective accompaniment and protective presence, community-led safety and security initiatives such as early-warning early-response mechanisms, civilians protecting one another through Women and Youth Protection Teams, conflict de-escalation techniques, civilian ceasefire and peace agreement monitoring, the establishment of weapons-free zones – and much more. In the longer term, UCP uses civilian-led protection strategies to support and strengthen local peace infrastructures, engaging in training and capacity building. (Nonviolent Peaceforce 2022).

While early UCP models largely consisted of practitioners from the Global North providing UCP in Global South countries, there has been a shift away from this model. Debates continue to revolve around the roles that privilege—based on race, class and nationality—plays in UCP, with a trend aiming to decolonialize such practices. There is a long institutional tradition of UCP in Indonesia with Peace Brigades International working in Indonesia (Papua, Aceh, West Timor, Flores, Jakarta) from 1999-2011 and again since 2014. Nonviolent Peaceforce, through Nurani Perdamaian, has been active in Indonesia since 2020, mostly in Aceh.

Stories about how UCP effectively protects women, youth, elders, minority groups, etc. in Sudan, Ukraine, Iraq, Philippines, and other parts of the world, including the US amidst Asia Hate, can be found in Creating Safer Space's and Nonviolent Peaceforce's websites.

Capacities

There seems to be a shared understanding that in order for CSAs to better perform the above roles, capacity building is needed. Also, there seems to be a notion that training is one of the most, if not the most, important way to build capacities. Here, the relevance of training goes beyond its substance, as it presents spacetime for CSAs to meet and work together amidst their busy schedules and tight resources. A number of respondents mentioned how training by Jakarta-based CSOs—be it held in Jakarta or in other regions—bring together local CSAs that would not otherwise sit together. A caveat here is that training programs should not reinforce an assumption that Jakarta or Java-based CSAs have more to offer than those in other regions. Many respondents suggests that CSAs need to be more mindful in designing training, for example by having local CSAs serve as trainers and or facilitators, including for those at the national level.

Our respondents mentioned that the most frequently convened training in the last five years have been those on digital security and digital activism. In general, they express confidence that the series of training helped, or even compelled, them to develop standard operating procedures (SOP) to anticipate and respond to risks, including those pertaining to physical and digital repression, as well as sexual harassment. Nevertheless, some of them noted that improved knowledge does not necessarily mean improved habits. They admitted that many of their colleagues have not practiced digital hygiene to the fullest extent, be it out of habit, complacency, or (im)practicality. It is mostly those who have had first hand experiences of digital attacks—or those close to them—who religiously safeguard themselves and their circles. When asked the effectiveness of the SOP, most respondents admitted that such procedures have not been stress-tested, albeit simulated. Also, when probed if said SOP highlight specific vulnerabilities amongst specific groups, i.e. women, SOGIESC diverse persons, and persons with disability, some expressed that they should have.

Beside SOP, respondents underlined the need for safety nets. Our journalist respondents shared how they felt supported by Komisi Keselamatan Jurnalis (journalist safety committee, henceforth KKJ) when they experienced doxxing and other threats. When asked if they think KKJ would have the capacity to support all journalists, in the unlikely event that hundreds of journalists were attacked at the same time, our respondents admit that such a scenario has never been carefully thought of.

One important safety net is an emergency fund that can be quickly and easily accessed by CSAs, especially when they are being criminalized, physically attacked, laid off, etc. Such a fund would allow for physical relocation, safehouses, medical expenses, legal aid, and such. [Crisis Response Management (CRM) Consortium](#) has disbursed over 1.1 billion Indonesian rupiah worth of emergency fund to over 4,700 SOGIESC diverse recipients. More generally, [Kurawal](#)'s Dana Cepat Tanggap Darurat (quick response emergency funds, henceforth DCTD) supported 12 cases and 45 individuals between April 2023 and March 2024, including farmers, workers, and students. Amongst others, it helped a media portal in Papua to counter digital attacks upon them releasing information that are contrary to the state's interest as well as supported movements in Labuan Bajo and Wadas to launch nonviolent resistance against PSN.

Circling back to points at the previous chapter and sections, a number of capacities needed to enhanced, include skills in brokering and networking, in community organizing (differentiated from program management), in nonviolent resistance and UCP, etc.

Key Takeaways:
- CSAs have been pushing for democratic agendas and resisting autocratization through five main mechanisms: enlivening civic engagement, joining or forming political parties, joining or consulting with the government, using judicial mechanisms, and taking nonviolent resistance for change. However, the second and third mechanisms have been futile.
- CSAs in Indonesia primarily focus on the point of decision and destruction. Some organizations rally at point production without necessarily applying pressure there, while digital campaigns and some movements sequentially target points of assumptions and opportunities. However, the points of production and consumption remain underutilized.
- The repertoires of resistance have been narrow and their intensities have been low. Utilizing new high-intensity methods will bring in the surprise factor needed for nonviolent resistance to throw opponents off balance.
- Capacity-building challenges involve limited spacetime for CSAs to meet and work together, the lack of stress-testing for SOP, and the need for safety nets, such as safety committees and emergency funds.

Act

The Big Picture chapter informs us of the plays that autocrats have at hand to shrink civic spacetime. The Connect and Defend chapters indicate how thinly stretched the CSA lineup is, how scant the imagination is on the neutrals and passive allies to call to play, how sparsely fielded CSAs are around the points of decision and destruction only, and how easily thwarted their repertoires of resistance are due to the overreliance on just a handful of low intensity methods. There is no better time to act other than now, before the civic spacetime closes altogether. We recommend three major strategies to push back against shrinking civic spacetime in Indonesia: crowding the spacetime, pushing where it matters, and playing defensive.

Crowd the Spacetime

There is a general feeling that CSAs have been overwhelmed and stretched thin. Therefore, it would be strategic to bring in more players and field them accordingly on the "save civic spacetime" lineup. In doing so, given the pluriversality of civic spacetimes across Indonesia, CSAs should repeatedly and continuously map out their Spectrum of Allies—especially taking into account the fact that Spectrum of Allies maps would look differently across regions, sectors, and networks. If any, what might be similar across those maps would be that it is currently only populated by the few usual suspects: NGO and LBH workers, as well as journalists closer to one side of the spectrum—with government officials, political parties, corporations (especially in the extractive sectors), and police on the other.

Neutral Actors. When it comes to Spectrum of Allies, it may be strategic to not narrowly think of already and possible allies, but of neutral actors. The opponent is actively pulling them towards their end of the spectrum, either by coercion, cooptation, or by overwhelming their spacetime. Thus, it is important to actively pull them to our side. Think of workers, teachers, students, youth, artists, football supporters, parents, etc.

Bring Everyone In. A number of principles to think of when bringing in more actors: early entrance (start in schools), low bar (everyone matters) and systematic (reach as many people as possible). The opponent is not putting up high standards for these people to come to their side, so neither should CSAs.

Prioritize the Most Vulnerable. Bringing CSAs to the lineup is not a matter of putting together an all-star team. Instead, the most important is to bring in the most vulnerable, as part of our duty of care. The closer they are brought into the Spectrum of Allies, the more privilege that can be lent to them.

Privilege. CSAs need to be more forthcoming in lending their privileges, which come from the combination of their identities—gender, class, religion, ethnicity, able-bodied-ness, age, etc. Intersectional and cross-sectoral solidarity entails being active allies to other individuals and groups who face challenges that are specific to them and not necessarily impact us directly.

Brokering. CSAs and donors need to invest time and resources to identify, train, and support those in the civil society who would be willing to take on the role of brokering groups that would otherwise not connect to one another. The brokering needs to foster bridging, not bonding relations.

Critical Citizenry. The lack of public concern on the creeping autocratization and the high percentage of youth who voted for the 2024 president elect indicate significant failings in terms of critical thinking in civic education. Indonesian school and university curricula seem more interested in creating a docile workforce than a critical citizenry. That said, CSAs need to shoulder additional roles pertaining to instilling critical thinking and modelling what it means to be a good citizen, including through popular culture.

National as Translocal. Given how easily local and low politics issues get sidelined, it is crucial to be intentional and surgical about centering local perspectives. "National" does not have to be an aggregation of "locals." National can be a space where local concerns get addressed by a wider circle of CSAs.

Push Where It Matters the Most

Civil society has played, and continues to play, important roles in defending civic spacetime, as well as pursuing social and environmental justice in Indonesia. This important work has made many activists and journalists targets of repression. Defending against threats and attacks has cost much energy and threatens to weaken CSAs' effectiveness in terms of safeguarding civic spacetime and democracy—which in the long run hampers sustainability. Given limited resources, CSAs need to prioritize strategies that improve the safety and security of CSAs and increase the margins of success in defending against shrinking civic spacetime. Here, we put forward an imaginary that goes beyond "picking one's battles" and is more about "pushing the right buttons." The former alludes to selecting moves that are more suitable to our capacities, whereas the latter explicitly targets the opponents vital nodes.

Training. While training on a range of issues, especially digital security and digital activism, have been stepped up, it is imperative to highlight that a number of regions do not have equal access to said training. Also, having received training does not automatically translate to being able to deliver training on said issues. This requires training—including training of trainers—to be done more locally, with the involvement of local actors, in the effort of replicating results in a more wide-ranging, sustainable, and cheaper manner.

SOP. While there has been progress in developing SOP, many organizations have flagged their concerns towards the lack of stress-testing. To address this, CSA coalitions could develop stress-test simulations to assess the viability and effectiveness of their protection measures.

UCP. Given the proliferation of physical attacks and threats against activists in many parts of Indonesia, protection measures could incorporate unarmed civilian protection—a methodology highlighting civilian-to-civilian protection.

Public Awareness. To build on a broad-based coalition, CSAs need to ensure that large parts of the Indonesian population are sufficiently aware about the extent to which civic spacetime has been shrinking. This includes thinking of ways to get information about human rights violations and autocratization outside of the coalition's "bubble."

Dilemma Action. Those who have been sensitized to act should then be equipped with a wide range of repertoires of resistance to tinker with—one that makes use of the varying degrees of intensity and dilemma actions provided by the 198 methods of nonviolent action, including the utilization of digital platforms. Paying heed to Gandhi's famous quote, "First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win," the increased targeting of CSAs by state and non-state actors can be read as proof that CSAs have found the right buttons to push. While

ensuring the safety and protection of CSAs is of highest importance, CSAs should also aim to evoke the backfire effect as well as the moral and political *jiu-jitsu* linked to the use of violence against them. This is done by ensuring that it is psychologically costly for previously neutral observers to ignore the violence, or by ensuring that it is politically, socially, and economically costly for opponents to proceed with the utilization of violence.

Point of Intervention. In employing civil resistance strategies, CSAs should be cognizant of all points of intervention, particularly point of production and point of consumption.

Flexible Emergency Funds. International donors should up their direct support for CSAs that are defending democracy and human rights in Indonesia, especially in terms of providing flexible emergency funds. This call is necessary given the redirection of funds throughout the last decade– from human rights protection to development projects, from CSOs to government agents (Bappenas, etc.).

Playing Offense

Throughout the last decade, it seems that the autocrats have largely held the initiative in Indonesia. While defending against shrinking civic spacetime is highly important, CSAs should consider that offense often is the best defense. Civil resistance and social movement studies, for example, have shown that it is often action that brings in new people to engage and new coalitions to form. Movements that build on small and limited victories often managed to grow into large national campaigns that managed to stop or reverse autocratization. We thus believe that civil society needs to also engage in playing offense, rather than only reacting to punches and blows by the autocrats.

Graph 7. Pillars of Support
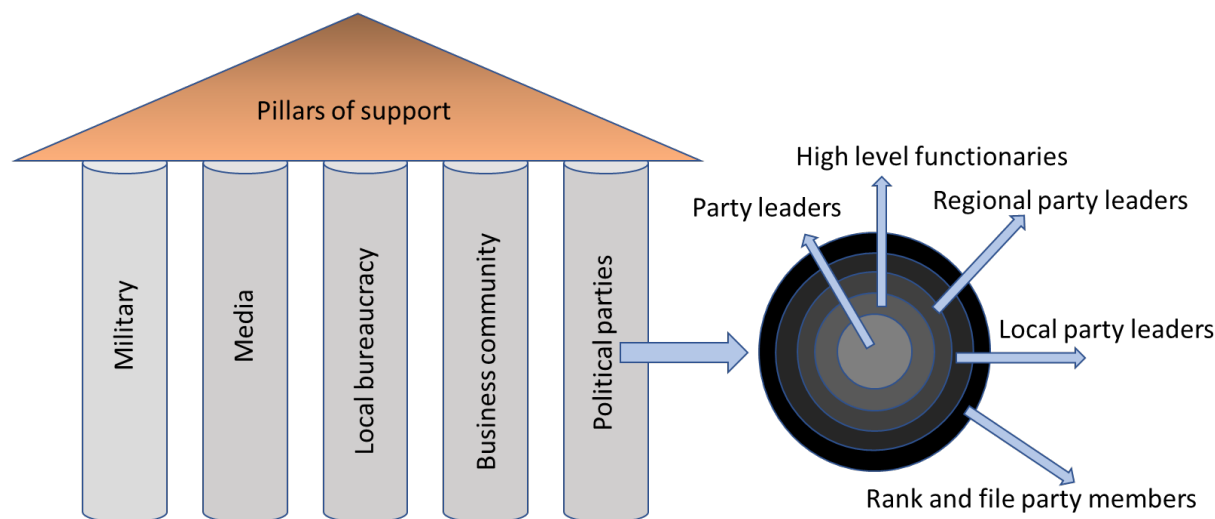
Modified from Popovic et al. (2007)

Scenarios and Simulations. Seeing that Indonesian political elites have followed The Authoritarian Playbook, CSAs can proactively anticipate the autocrats' possible next moves. Here, CSAs can develop scenarios and simulations that war-game further steps towards autocratization and thus pre-emptively developing strategies to prevent and/or counter further attacks against CSAs and civic spacetime.

Pillar of Support. At the opposite side of activists' Spectrum of Allies is the opponent's Pillars of Support (see Graph 7). CSAs should utilize Pillar of Support with a great detail to identify whom within the opponent's coalition can be weakened or even drawn closer to the CSA's Spectrum of Allies.

Supermajorities. Studies show that big-tent coalitions are inherently unstable as it is rational for actors to seek minimum-winning coalitions (big enough to secure wins, but small enough to secure optimal redistributive gains). Thus, we can strongly assume that the governing coalition is not as stable as it might look like to the public. This opens opportunities for civil society to engage some of the political parties that might become dissatisfied with the big-tent coalition and form issue-based alliances that can perhaps block certain autocratization strategies.

Redlines. To forestall creeping autocratization, CSAs should collectively determine a number of redlines in terms of shrinking civic spacetime and autocratization. These red lines should be clearly communicated to the public and elites, that if these lines (i.e. revoking direct elections) are crossed, a wide-spread civil resistance and non-cooperation campaign would start. Effectiveness of such strategy would require commitment of a big-tent CSA alliance including labor, teachers, students, etc. to act collectively.

Legal Mechanisms. Given that shrinking civic spacetime has been linked to the passing and implementation of a number of bad laws (including, but not limited to, ITE, Ormas, KPK, and Omnibus), CSAs should continue and step up legal and political challenges of those laws. One important function of CSAs is to document the negative impacts that these laws have on human rights issues in Indonesia. Advocacy in international human rights fora concerning these laws is also important. While the legal system in Indonesia has significant shortcomings, given that both the executive and political party route seems at current to be closed to civil society influence, the judiciary seems the only constitutional-institutional power that still can be aspired to defend the core democratic pillars of the Indonesian constitution.

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Annex

Annex 1. Table of Guideline Questions (RQ).

Baseline Questions of CDA Project Indicators	Baseline Study Questions from Humanis' Terms of Reference (ToR)
Identify the level of capacity of the CSAs on digital/holistic security! E.g.Have the SOP? Trained? Mentored? Got support? Etc.	What are the key digital (and non-digital) security trends and developments impacting CSAs' ability to defend human rights in the context of shrinking civic space?
Did the CSAs ever experience any form of digital attacks in the past 5 years? If yes, what were the cases? Were the cases fully solved? Were the cases documented?	
Do the CSAs currently have material/curriculum/syllabus, and any materials related to digital security? If yes, are those made from scratch or adapted from others, from whom? How do they utilize those?	
How many members of the organization (CSA) are trained to become trainers of digital security?	
What are the CSAs' strategies to tackle urgent digital, physical, legal, psychosocial attacks? What are the existing mechanisms of reaching support providers? How does the referral system work?	
	What are the key/critical laws/policies/ regulations at the national to the sub-national level that impact CSA's works to defend human rights and civic space?
Identify what mediums/spaces of collaboration that CSAs are having?	What are the existing (formal and informal) coalitions, networks, and coordination structures among CSAs active in defending human rights and civic space?
How regular are the CSAs conducting monitoring related to civic space issues? How do they conduct the monitoring? What are the uses and who are the users of the monitoring result?	
What are the strategic and relevant regional and international forums the CSAs wanted to participate in? Why?	
	How is the post-election situation specifically impacting women and vulnerable/ marginalized groups (e.g., indigenous, local, traditional groups, LGBTQI+, religious minorities)?
What are the CSAs' strategies to tackle urgent digital, physical, legal, psychosocial attacks? What are the existing mechanisms of reaching support providers? How does the referral system work?	What are the key CSAs' coalitions' SWOTs and specific challenges, particularly those representing women, LGBTQI+ persons, and other marginalized groups?
What are the CSAs strategies to tackle urgent digital, physical, legal, psychosocial attacks? What are the existing mechanisms of reaching support providers? How does the referral system work?	What are specific concerns/issues and medium/platforms, as well as forms of activism do young people in Indonesia have today to defend human rights and civic space?
Identify how CSAs define "positive influence" and how did they get and share those? What are the knowledge exchange activities they are initiating/participating in?	What are the reflections and ideas on how we can better support the regeneration of CSAs, activists, and human rights defenders?
How do the CSAs develop their own evidence-based strategy for their advocacy/campaign/intervention? Provide relevant examples for the past 5 years?	
What are the aspirations of the CSAs about their needs to enhance organizational capacity? In which part/aspect that they think really pressing? In what ways can other parties help/assist/support?	Drawing stakeholders' mapping and providing recommendations for project implementation based on the above-mentioned points.

Annex 2. Disaggregated data of Key Informant Interviews (KII).

Number of respondents according to gender (F/M/Nonbinary)	Number of respondents according to age (> or <40 years old)	Number of respondents according to localities (Java/Outside Java)	Number of respondents with disability
Female: 13 Male: 7 Non-binary: 0	Below 40: 14 Above 40: 6	Outside Java: 13 Java: 7	Physical disability: 1 Able-bodied: 19
Total Respondents: 20			