



CoDA Series 1: Yogyakarta

Civic Spacetime in a City of Contradictions

written by

Luqman-nul Hakim
Nadya Zafira
Maurizka Callista Chairunnisa
diah kusumaningrum
Daniel Petz
Arindha Nityasari
Randy Wirasta Nandyatama

2026

This publication has been produced
with financial support from Norway.
The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility
of the Institute of International Studies, Hivos and Humanis,
and can in no way be taken to reflect the views
of the Government of Norway.

Table of Contents

Preface	5
Executive Summary	7
Introducing CoDA	11
What is CoDA?	11
Significance	12
Approach	13
Methods: Monitoring Civic Spacetime in Yogyakarta	14
Yogyakarta: A City of Contradictions	17
Discrepancies and Structural Contradictions	17
Development Trajectories and Spatial Constraints	18
Civic Spacetime as Structured Arena of Contestation.....	20
CoDA: Assessing Civic Spacetime.....	22
Overcoming Fragmentations, Vulnerabilities, and Ineffectiveness	23
A Shrunken Civic Spacetime	23
Civil Liberties, Elections, and Democracy: Then and Now.....	24
Civic Spacetime: Space for Expression, Not Necessarily Contestation	26
Connect	26
Linked, Yet Fragmented.....	27
Missing Actors, Missing Links.....	28
Time as Currency.....	29
Defend	30
Vulnerable, Yet Undeterred.....	30
Direct, Structural, and Cultural	32
Collective Carework as Key Infrastructure	33
Act	33
Forceful, Yet Ineffective	33
Sanitization of Dissent	34
Too Late? Wargame!	36
References	37

Lists of figures

Figure 1. Gender composition of informants (1st phase of interviews).....	15
Figure 2. Gender composition of informants (2nd phase of interviews)	15
Figure 3. Age composition of informants (1st phase of interviews).....	15
Figure 4. Age composition of informants (2nd phase of interviews)	15
Figure 5. Employment sector of informants (1st phase of interviews).....	16
Figure 6. Employment sector of informants (2nd phase of interviews)	16
Figure 7. Civil society sector (1st phase of interviews)	16
Figure 8. Civil society sector (2nd phase of interviews).....	16
Figure 9. Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs' Self-assessment of Their Capacities to Connect, Defend, Act	23
Figure 10. Average Scores of Democracy, Civil Liberties, and Elections 2019/2020 vs 2024/2025.....	24
Figure 11. What are the obstacles to bridging CSAs/CSOs in Yogyakarta?.....	28
Figure 12. How safe do you feel in performing civil society, election, and democracy-related work?	31
Figure 13. Which actors are most likely to disturb your civil liberty, election, and democracy-related work?.....	31
Figure 14. Who are the vulnerable, marginalized, and/or minority groups you have expressed solidarity with?	35
Figure 15. What are the forms of support you extend to vulnerable, marginalized, and/or minority groups?	35

List of tables

Table 1. CSOs' Categories and Democratic Functions.....	14
---	----

Preface

Nested within the global third wave of autocratization, the nation-wide crackdown of activists, and the local context of *keistimewaan*, shrinking civic spacetime in Yogyakarta presents a perfect storm. It is high time that civil society organizations (CSOs) and actors (CSAs) up their capacities to connect, defend, and act in ways that center the ethics of collective care.

Globally, the third wave of autocratization attests to how autocratic actors have been borrowing tactics from one another, perfecting their authoritarian playbook. Using salami tactics, they “sliced off” democracy ever so gradually. Instead of dismissing democracy altogether through swift *coup d'états*, autocratic actors utilized democratic procedures to slowly grab and consolidate power, and eventually erode democracy from within, outplaying democracy-loving actors in their own game. So far, only a few countries managed to enact a democratic U-turn, some of them through Gen-Z-led revolutions, including Chile, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Madagascar.

Nationally, CSOs/CSAs have tried to put forward a discourse of Indonesia being *darurat* (in emergency), *gelap* (in darkness), and needing a reset. Obviously, autocratic elites have no intention to hand over power. As anticipated by CDA’s baseline study on Indonesia, they resorted to a number of tactics from the authoritarian playbook: stoking violence, quashing criticism and dissent, and spreading disinformation. Following the Reset Indonesia uprising in August 2025, over 1,000 arbitrary arrests were made, with over 300 of them targeting minors. Also, as the new set of Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code come into effect in 2026, criminalization of activists, or even lay citizens, becomes easier than ever. While CSOs/CSAs may have standard procedures to safeguard and defend themselves against criminalization and various kinds of attacks, the massiveness of the most recent crackdown speaks to the need to stress-test these procedures and support systems.

Locally, Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs are bound to the context of *keistimewaan* — that is, a special political status, where governorship is automatically held by the Sultan and passed down hereditarily. Here, a culture of “harmony” is imposed amidst structural poverty and inequality. This produces a condition within which Yogyakarta CSO/CSAs are more assertive in voicing nation-wide concerns and more restrained in working on local issues, especially those linked to the Sultanate.

Amidst such a perfect storm of civic spacetime, Yogyakarta CSAs/CSOs have started developing new strategies and tactics. It is this very process that the CoDA civic spacetime monitoring program wishes to record. CoDA is developed by Institute of International Studies (IIS) Universitas Gadjah Mada as part of Connect, Defend, Act! (CDA), a project conceived by Hivos and Humanis, with the support of the Norwegian Agency for Development and Cooperation (NORAD).

Albeit being a civic spacetime monitoring report, this document feels more like a love letter, collectively composed by Yogyakarta CSAs/CSOs dedicated to their own cohort. We deeply thank our informants for sharing their space and time with us, and for generously contributing to enhancing our civic spacetime. We believe that your commitment to collective care would sustain your endeavors in outsmarting and outlasting autocratic actors.

Yogyakarta, January 2026

Executive Summary

This CoDA monitoring report examines civic spacetime in Yogyakarta, a province widely recognized as a center of education, culture, and civic activism in Indonesia. Despite this reputation, Yogyakarta is also shaped by distinctive political arrangements, persistent socio-economic inequality, and development trajectories that generate structural constraints on civic life.

CoDA approaches civic spacetime as the interaction of space, time, agency, and power through which civil society organizations and civil society actors (CSOs/CSAs) connect with one another, defend themselves from encroachment, and act to advance collective interests. Rather than assessing institutional performance or building a hierarchical typology of civic spacetime, CoDA foregrounds how civic actors perceive, experience, and navigate their civic environment.

CoDA adopts a diagnostic and context-sensitive approach, seeking to capture patterns of expansion, stagnation, and contraction in civic spacetime as lived by CSOs/CSAs. The findings presented here draw on mixed-methods research conducted between May and June 2025, including interviews with 50 CSOs/CSAs, validation workshops, focus group discussions, and extensive desk review on the current state and dynamic of democracy and civic space.

General Overview

High democratic and development indicators obscure lived experiences of democratic erosion and rising burdens and risks of civic engagement. Yogyakarta consistently ranks among the top provinces in national democracy and human development indices, reinforcing its image as a progressive region but fail to capture how democracy and civic space is perceived, experienced and practiced by CSAs. High institutional performance does not necessarily translate into vibrant and democratic civic spacetime. In fact, it can coexist with political arrangements and development priorities that raise the costs and risks of civic engagement, particularly for those engaged in contentious and politically sensitive advocacy.

Yogyakarta's civic spacetime remains formally open yet substantively constrained by structural contradictions between democratic reputation, political exceptionalism of keistimewaan, and tourism development-driven pressures. While civil liberties are constitutionally protected and democratic institutions remain intact, CSAs describe a shrinking arena for meaningful contestation, particularly on local issues linked to land governance, spatial planning, and the Sultanate. Civic action is rarely prohibited outright. But, the conditions under which CSAs can sustain engagement, contest power, and influence policy making are shaped by cultural norms, political sensitivities and unequal access to resources. The issues of civic actions also varied greatly across urban

and peri-urban settings. In urban settings, civic actions are generally organized to respond to national politics. The issues on peri-urban areas are more complex, as it includes such issues as tourism development projects, repressions, capital expansion, destruction of environment and displacement. Structured within specific socio-political settings, civic spacetime in Yogyakarta remains conducive for addressing national issues, yet CSOs/CSAs tend to avoid dealing with issues associated with the Sultanate.

Civic spacetime is greatly shaped by structural factors that create distinct agential power, arena of contestation, and the outcome of struggles. Yogyakarta continues to face structural socio-economic challenges, particularly poverty rate, inequality and wage standard – among the worst in the country. These conditions matter directly. Economic precarity reduces the time, energy, and emotional capacity available for civic engagement, particularly among students, informal workers, and grassroots activists. Participation becomes uneven and increasingly dependent on organizational resources, external funding, or personal endurance.

CoDA Key Findings

CONNECT – Fragmented Networks Under Conditions of Precarity and Inequality

Yogyakarta CSAs possess strong relational networks, yet fragmentation significantly weakens collective leverage and strategic coherence. Most CSAs report being well connected, especially to national organizations and inter-city networks. However, local coordination within Yogyakarta remains uneven and issue-driven. Collaboration is often reactive – mobilized in response to specific policies or crises – rather than oriented toward shared long-term visions for civic spacetime. Fragmentation, competition, and limited resources continue to hinder coalition-building.

Economic precarity transforms time into a critical constraint on sustaining civic engagement. Low wages, high living costs, and persistent inequality mean that most CSAs engage in civic work alongside full-time employment or unpaid labor. Only a small minority are fully remunerated for civic activities. As a result, time becomes a scarce and precarious resource, limiting the ability to maintain consistent organizing, leadership regeneration, and strategic planning.

Administrative and professionalization pressures further erode civic capacity to connect. Across NGOs, academia, and media organizations, CSAs report being overwhelmed by bureaucratic requirements and reporting obligations. For many, administrative tasks consume the majority of their working time, crowding out opportunities for grassroots engagement, alliance-building, and movement development.

Key social groups remain weakly connected to civic spacetime, limiting its social depth and resilience. CSAs consistently identify students, parents, workers, farmers, artists, and other members of the general public as underrepresented actors.

High student mobility, short-term project cycles, and economic insecurity complicate recruitment and continuity, weakening the social base of civic engagement.

DEFEND — Heightened Vulnerability Amid Informal Boundaries

CSAs perceive civic engagement in Yogyakarta as increasingly unsafe, despite the absence of systematic overt repression. A majority of informants report exposure to physical intimidation, digital harassment, surveillance, and arbitrary arrests — either personally or within their networks. Perceptions of safety have deteriorated over the past five years, particularly following mass demonstrations and nationwide crackdowns.

Political sensitivities surrounding *keistimewaan* and the Sultanate function as informal boundaries that shape defensive strategies. Many CSAs deliberately avoid direct criticism of local power structures, redirecting their advocacy toward national issues as a means of reducing risk. While this strategy may mitigate immediate threats, it narrows the scope of permissible local contestation and reinforces uneven civic spacetime.

Cultural norms of deference and harmony reinforce structural vulnerabilities in civic spacetime. Deeply embedded values discouraging confrontation with authority — especially in matters related to land, development, and palace-linked projects — are enforced through social pressure and, at times, vigilante violence. These informal mechanisms play a central role in constraining civic action without reliance on formal repression.

Collective care has emerged as a critical yet under-resourced infrastructure for civic defense. CSAs increasingly emphasize mutual support, emotional care, and shared responsibility as essential to sustaining activism under pressure. However, establishing such systems requires time, trust, and resources that are themselves constrained by precarity and overwork.

ACT—Persistent Mobilization, Limited Structural Impact

Yogyakarta CSAs remain highly active and creative, yet increasingly doubt the effectiveness of their actions in producing structural change. CSAs continue to mobilize through protests, advocacy campaigns, capacity-building, and community support, drawing on Yogyakarta's long tradition of civic activism. Nonetheless, many express frustration that sustained efforts have not resulted in meaningful policy shifts, particularly over the past decade.

Civic action is increasingly oriented toward service provision and solidarity rather than direct contestation of power. Local activism prioritizes supporting marginalized and affected communities through legal aid, shelter, education, and emergency assistance. While essential, this emphasis often substitutes for direct challenges to decision-makers, reflecting both strategic adaptation and constrained civic spacetime.

Dissent is increasingly sanitized through self-restraint, disinformation, and depoliticization of public space. Critical narratives are frequently diluted or redirected, with protests framed as disruptive to social order or economic activity. Online disinformation further undermines public engagement, contributing to apathy and limiting the resonance of civic claims.

Civil resistance remains largely reactive, constraining its transformative potential. Most civic action responds to policies, crises, or repression after they occur, with limited anticipatory planning. CSAs highlight the need for greater strategic foresight to anticipate authoritarian tactics, diversify repertoires of nonviolent action, and expand civic spacetime beyond its current boundaries.

Yogyakarta represents a critical case of civic spacetime under democratic erosion: a setting where strong formal democratic performance coexists with structural constraints that quietly but decisively reshape civic life. For CoDA, Yogyakarta demonstrates that protecting civic spacetime requires not only safeguarding civil liberties, but also addressing inequality, depoliticization of space, and the normalization of silence in the face of power. Overall, the Yogyakarta case underscores that safeguarding civic spacetime requires attention not only to formal freedoms, but also to inequality, informal power, development trajectories, and the everyday capacities of civic actors to connect, defend, and act.

Introducing CoDA

What is CoDA?

CoDA¹ is a subnational monitoring program designed to capture how CSAs perceive, experience, and navigate their civic spacetime. Rather than measuring democracy solely through institutional benchmarks, CoDA focuses on the agency that CSOs/CSAs have in living their civic life amidst distinctive socio-political settings.

CoDA adopts a diagnostic rather than evaluative approach. It does not aim to rank regions or actors, but generate context-sensitive evidence on patterns of expansion, stagnation, or contraction in civic spacetime. CoDA complements global democracy and civic space indices by prioritizing variance, depth, interpretation, and local insights. It offers accounts on various aspects that underlie civic life, allowing for evidence-based interventions and guidance on how to increase the quality of civic space.

Amidst the plethora of datasets and indices on democracy and civic space, the following features clarify CoDA's scope:

- CoDA does not produce hierarchical classifications of civic spacetime. While recognizing significant variations across time and place, it avoids simplifying civic conditions into categories such as good, flawed, or bad. Instead, it documents the underlying factors shaping civic engagement, allowing for more nuanced and evidence-based interventions.
- CoDA does not generate national-level scores. Its analytical focus is explicitly subnational. This focus allows CoDA to capture local dynamics that are often obscured by national aggregation.
- CoDA is not an incident-based monitoring system. It does not record day-to-day events of repression or violence. Rather, it produces annual assessments of patterns and trends in civic spacetime, complementing organizations such as the Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS), which document daily incidents of violence and repression experienced by civilians.
- CoDA does not assess formal democratic structures such as electoral systems, party competition, or constitutional design. Instead, the emphasis is on how democracy is experienced in practice, particularly in CSOs/CSAs' perceived capacity to sustain engagement and contest power through nonviolent means.

¹ Here, CoDA stands for "COnnect, Defend, Act!" which is the umbrella programme for this civic spacetime monitoring project. While "coda" sometimes refers to the concluding section of a musical, literary, dramatic, or dance work, we acknowledge that the term "CoDA" is also used to refer to Children of Deaf Adults. We hope our adoption of "CoDA" lends itself to greater and meaningful visibility of Children of Deaf Adults.

Significance

“Civic space” has become a central concept in contemporary debates on democracy, governance, and development. While democratic institutions remain intact and civil liberties are constitutionally protected, CSAs experience a narrowing area of manoeuvre, increased self-censorship, as well as rising emotional and material tolls associated with sustained civic engagement. These dynamics reflect broader global trends in which democratic erosion takes place incrementally and from within democratic systems themselves (Kusumaningrum et al. 2024).

There is growing consensus in recent democracy studies that democratic resilience depends not only on elections and formal institutions, but also on whether citizens and CSAs can organize, express dissent, build alliances, and participate meaningfully in public life.

Civic space is commonly defined through core civil liberties, particularly freedom of association, freedom of expression, and the right to peaceful assembly. These approaches, widely used by global monitoring initiatives such as CIVICUS and Varieties of Democracy Project (V-Dem), have been critical in documenting democratic backsliding and identifying legal and institutional restrictions on civil society. However, their reliance on standardized indicators and national-level aggregation often limits their ability to capture local variation, informal practices, and gradual forms of constraint.

As a result, a growing body of scholarship and advocacy research argues that civic space should be understood not only as a legal or institutional domain, but as a lived and relational arena. Civic space is shaped by everyday power relations, social norms, economic precarity, and informal pressures that may not register as overt repression. From this perspective, civic space may formally exist while becoming increasingly difficult to access and use in practice (Chambers & Kopstein 2006; Keane & Merkel 2019).

Situated within these debates, CoDA embraces the pluriversality of what civic space means to various civil society actors in Indonesia. Apart from the formal definition of civic space that emphasizes the dimensions of civil liberties, several civil society organizations look into different aspects such as “*ruang manuver*” or manoeuvre space ([Lokataru Foundation](#), [Pusat Studi Hukum dan Kebijakan](#)), “*ruang hidup*” or living space ([Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria](#), [Jaringan Advokasi Tambang](#), [Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia](#), [Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Jakarta](#)), “*ruang digital*” or digital space ([SAFENet](#)), “*ruang privat*” or private space that needs depatriarchalizing ([PurpleCode Collective](#)), “*ruang perukunan, bukan ruang kerukunan*” or space where majoritarian harmony is enforced ([Koalisi Kebebasan Beragama dan Berkeyakinan](#)), and “*ruang antimiliterisme*” or anti-militaristic space where civilian supremacy reigns.

With a “spacetime” mindset, CoDA further investigates those meanings to not lose sight of the “time” aspect that is arguably less explicit than the “space” dimension. CoDA puts forward an understanding of civic spacetime that revolves around the capacity to

engage in nonviolent contestation: *without meaningful nonviolent contestation, there is no real democracy*. Hence, democracy weakens not only when civic space is formally restricted, but also when civil society actors are exhausted, fragmented, or unable to sustain long-term engagement and struggles.

Approach

CoDA employs feminist methodologies of intersubjectivity, intersectionality, and positionality.

Intersubjectivity. CoDA adopts an emic, inductive approach, refraining from insinuating, let alone enforcing, a specific understanding of civic spacetime from the outset. Its questionnaire uses everyday terms such as “*ruang sipil*” (civic space), “*kebebasan sipil*” (civic liberties), “*pemilu*” (elections), and “*demokrasi*” (democracy), and only gradually introduces “*ruang-waktu sipil*” (civic spacetime) as the “time” aspect becomes more pronounced in the interview. This model allows informants to be more thoughtful and reflective in approaching the topic. Moreover, it allows researchers to gauge the power-laden interactions among subjectivities that inform the informants’ understanding of the world they live in.

Intersectionality. CoDA believes that civic spacetime is experienced, perceived, and lived differently by different persons, in relation to the various intersecting identities and social settings. Therefore, CoDA puts extra care in developing its list of informants, to ensure that the lived experience of the most vulnerable and marginalized are centered – not treated as add-ons, or even invisibilized. This prevents CoDA from targeting the low-hanging fruit of merely looking into repressions towards human rights defenders or those impacting the majority of people.

Positionality. CoDA recognizes the potential biases it may have. The biases may come from UGM’s institutional standing as a public university, in which many staff members and alumni are affiliated to the regime, as civil servants for example. It may also come from the fact that CoDA researchers are part of the middle class, are cisgender and heterosexual, are able-bodied, and are affiliated with the majority religious and ethnic groups. Here, CoDA researchers consciously shelve their prejudice and continuously consult with the most vulnerable and marginalized in each region to make sure that the questionnaire and interview center on their lived experiences.

CoDA juxtaposes its nonviolent contestation-heavy conceptualization of civic spacetime with categories developed by Chambers and Kopstein (2006) and functions identified by Keane and Merkel (2019). These conceptualizations inform CoDA’s questionnaire and coding rules.

Table 1. CSOs' Categories and Democratic Functions

CSO Categories	CSO Functions
1. Apart from the state	1. Protecting against state intervention
2. Against the state	2. Observing and monitoring state power
3. In dialogue with the state	3. Supporting democratic-participatory socialization of citizens and recruitment of democratic elites to decision-making bodies
4. In support of the state	4. Opening effective channels for generating, aggregating, and articulating common values beyond formal political channels
5. In partnership with the state	5. Civilizing and democratizing local authoritarian enclaves, and
6. Beyond the state	7. 6. Bridging deeper societal enclaves, thus helping mitigate violent conflicts

Sources: Chambers and Kopstein (2006: 364) and Keane and Merkel (2019: 374).

Methods: Monitoring Civic Spacetime in Yogyakarta

CoDA employs a mixed-methods research design to monitor civic spacetime in Yogyakarta. The methodology balances analytical rigor with contextual sensitivity, ensuring that findings reflect lived experiences while remaining systematically comparable.

The research process began with a review of media coverage and reports produced by civil society organizations working on legal reform, human rights, environmental justice, and digital rights. These include analyses by Lokataru Foundation, the Center for Indonesian Law and Policy Studies (PSHK), the Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network (SAFENet), the Indonesian Forum for the Environment (WALHI), Indonesian Legal Aid (LBH), official reports such as Indonesian Democracy Index (IDI), Human Development Report (HDR), and other statistical data produced by, for example, the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS). The results of this literature review helped to illustrate a general picture of the state of civic space and democracy in Indonesia and Yogyakarta in particular, including emerging issues that we might look out for when collecting primary data from our key informants. We also identified actors that might be potential informants to be interviewed for this research.

Primary data collection is conducted through in-person and online interviews, where our enumerators follow a questionnaire systematically structured in our CoDA Codebook that has both closed and open-ended questions. While collecting data through online surveys may be cheaper, it does not provide opportunities for CoDA to build meaningful interactions and lasting relations — ingredients needed to collectively push back against shrinking civic space.

The interview with key informants was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, 20 civil society actors and organizations were interviewed in May 2025 using a structured questionnaire. An in-person workshop and focus group discussion in early June 2025 enabled validation and triangulation of preliminary findings, as well as mapping exercises. In the second phase, the revised questionnaire was administered to 30 additional CSOs/CSAs in Yogyakarta. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure accessibility and depth of engagement.

All data were subsequently coded using the CoDA Codebook. The analytical framework draws on conceptualizations of civil society as operating apart from, against, in dialogue with, in support of, and beyond the state (Chambers & Kopstein 2006), as well as its democratic functions of monitoring power, enabling participation, and mitigating conflict (Keane & Merkel 2019). These perspectives inform CoDA's emphasis on nonviolent contestation as a core dimension of civic spacetime.

Figure 1. Gender composition of informants (1st phase of interviews)

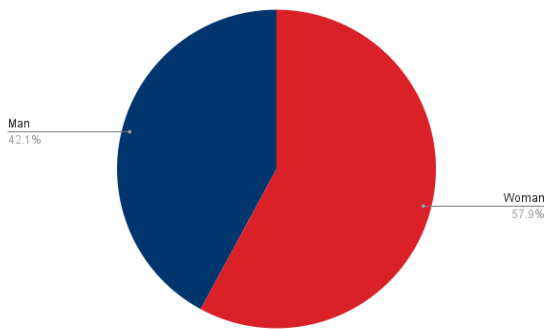


Figure 2. Gender composition of informants (2nd phase of interviews)

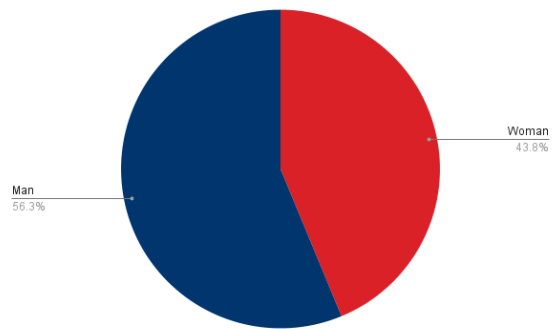


Figure 3. Age composition of informants (1st phase of interviews)

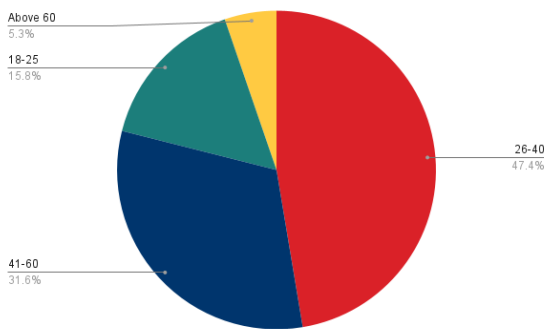


Figure 4. Age composition of informants (2nd phase of interviews)

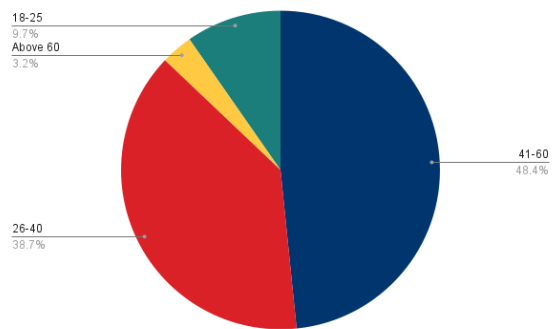


Figure 5. Employment sector of informants (1st phase of interviews)

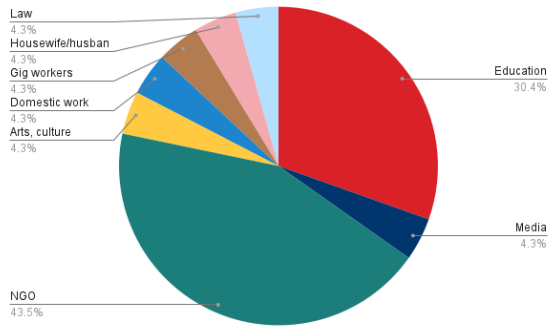


Figure 6. Employment sector of informants (2nd phase of interviews)

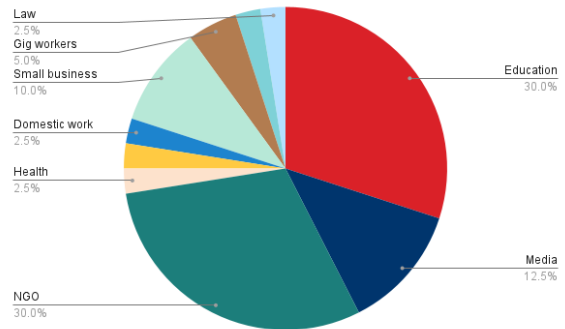


Figure 7. Civil society sector (1st phase of interviews)

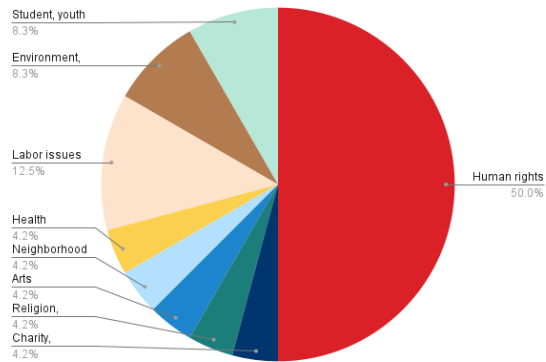
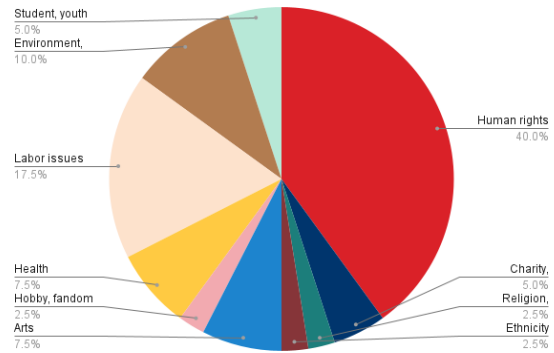


Figure 8. Civil society sector (2nd phase of interviews)



Yogyakarta: A City of Contradictions

Yogyakarta occupies a distinctive position in Indonesia's democratic landscape. It is widely perceived as a center of education, culture, and civic activism, yet it is also shaped by unique political arrangements, persistent socio-economic inequality, and development trajectories that generate structural constraints on civic engagement.

With a population of approximately 3.7 million, Yogyakarta presents a compact yet socially dynamic setting for civic life and democracy. Its governance structure — where the Sultan serves as hereditary governor — is constitutionally recognized and institutionalized through asymmetric decentralization under the Law on Special Region of Yogyakarta or *keistimewaan*, enacted in 2012. While this arrangement is often framed as culturally legitimate and politically stabilizing, it concentrates political authority and limits formal mechanisms of political accountability and civic engagement.

These characteristics, as further confirmed in our findings, constitute Yogyakarta a critical case. Civic spacetime is not formally closed, but the conditions under which CSOs/CSAs can sustain engagement, contest power, and influence policy making are shaped by cultural norms, political sensitivities and unequal access to resources.

Discrepancies and Structural Contradictions

Over the years, Yogyakarta consistently performs well on democratic and development indicators of prominent national indexes. The province ranked first nationally in the Indonesian Democracy Index (IDI) in 2025, with high scores across civil liberties (88.74), political rights (90.58), and democratic institutions (88.16) (BPS 2025a). Yogyakarta also consistently ranks among the top provinces on the Human Development Index (HDI), reflecting strong outcomes in education, health, and life expectancy. From 2020-2025, HDI average scores increased by 0.63 percent per annum, making this province among the most accelerated provinces in attaining human development indicators (BPS 2025b: 1-2).

These indicators contribute to Yogyakarta's reputation as a democratic and socially advanced province. However, as emphasized in the preceding chapter, aggregate indices provide limited insight into how democracy is experienced and practiced by CSOs/CSAs. High institutional performance does not necessarily translate into accessible or sustainable civic spacetime. Instead, it can coexist with political arrangements and development priorities that raise the costs and risks of civic engagement, particularly for those engaged in contentious and politically sensitive advocacy.

It is worth to note that civic engagement and the conditions of civic spacetime are greatly shaped by structural factors that create distinct agential power, arena of contestation and outcome of political struggles. Despite its special status, Yogyakarta continues to face structural socio-economic challenges. The province records the highest poverty rate (10.23 percent) on the island of Java and remains above the national average, 8.4 percent (BPS 2025c: 12). Income inequality is also persistently high, with Yogyakarta regularly registering one of Indonesia's highest Gini ratios (BPS 2025c: 18).

Labor conditions further shape civic spacetime in Yogyakarta. While the provincial minimum wage has increased incrementally, from IDR 2.2 million in 2025 to 2.4 million in 2026, it remains significantly below the estimated cost of a decent living and is still below the national average of IDR 3.5 million (Satu Data Ketenagakerjaan 2026). The influx of students from various economic conditions to migrate to live throughout their study period also led to a disparity in income between themselves and, most notably, between migrants and local population. It is not surprising that the cost of living has rapidly gone up over the years, exacerbating the purchasing power gaps.

Official calculations indicate that the minimum standard of living exceeds the minimum wage by a substantial margin, limiting disposable income and economic security for large segments of the population. For example, according to the 2025 Decent Standard of Living survey, the minimum cost for a worker to fulfil basic needs for decent living is IDR 4.6 million, far above provincial wage standard (Royani & Retnosari 2025). Compared to other big cities in the country, the disparity between the minimum wage standard and cost of living provides only space for survival. Young people suffer most in the struggle to pursue decent life, most notably their access to decent jobs and housing.

For civic spacetime, these conditions matter directly. As further confirmed in our findings, economic precarity reduces the time, energy, and emotional capacity available for civic engagement, particularly among students, informal workers, and grassroots activists. Participation becomes uneven and increasingly dependent on organizational resources, external funding, or personal endurance. As a result, they mostly work in their limited sector, constraining their ability to build a cross-alliance and push autocratization.

Development Trajectories and Spatial Constraints

Circumscribed within persistent structural poverty and inequality, Yogyakarta's economic development strategy emphasizes tourism, culture, education, and the service sector. The tertiary sector, especially education and tourism sectors, accounts for more than half of the province's Gross Regional Domestic Product, reflecting a development trajectory that is not anchored in industrial expansion (Fikri & Ekaria 2025). This development trajectory, as informed by the majority of our respondents, have far-reaching consequences in shaping civic spacetime — in terms of issue, agency, and arena of contestation.

Rapid mass tourism growth, real estate development, and influx of capital have intensified land conversion, housing pressure, and environmental problems, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas. Civil society organizations report increasing conflicts related to land use, ground water, displacement, and access to public space, often involving asymmetrical power relations between communities, investors, and authorities (LBH 2024). Without adequate anticipation, mass tourism also creates further challenges such as traffic congestion, waste management and seasonal inflation. With the absence of substantive policy interventions, this condition has been increasingly normalized.

In recent years, community dissents on tourism development trajectories are increasingly voiced by various social groups. This is particularly salient in the case of new airport development in Kulon Progo, tourism development in Gunung Kidul, and, recently, redevelopment in areas surrounding the palace.

In relation to the issue of urban development, UNICEF's decision to recognise the *sumbu filosofi* (cosmological axis)² as globally recognized cultural heritage in September 2023 are welcomed by mixed responses. For its proponents, the global recognition strengthens the province's tourism brand as a city of culture and enhances its cultural legitimacy for its special status. Embedded within the nexus of material interests and the preservation of cultural legacies, others frame this as providing the government with justification for its urban and tourism development projects by displacing street traders in Malioboro street and homes surrounding the Palace (LBH 2024: 26-27).

The trajectories of tourism development have also contributed to the depoliticization of civic engagement and produced a culture of silence particularly by controlling the spaces and cultural pressures. For example, following the Tourism Ministerial Decree (No.70/2016) on National Vital Object in Tourism Sector, the Yogyakarta government formally issued a regulation (Pergub No.1/2021) to ban mass demonstration in six considered vital objects including Malioboro street, a historic landmark for activism. Despite its status as a city of education, as our respondents mentioned, mass mobilization and demonstration are increasingly seen, especially in the digital media, pejoratively as a disturbance to tourism and unfit with the self-projected image of Yogyakarta as a 'harmonious' culture.

Civic spacetime in Yogyakarta varies significantly between urban and rural areas. In urban settings, particularly in Yogyakarta City, civic mobilization is often linked to national political developments. Student movements and civil society organizations continue to play a visible role in responding to national legislation and democratic backsliding, reflecting Yogyakarta's enduring role as a hub of student activism.

² *Sumbu filosofi* is an imaginary path that places the Yogyakarta Palace in the middle of a straight line stretching from Mount Merapi in the north to the ocean in the south, symbolizing harmony and balanced relations between human beings, God and nature.

Gejayan Memanggil (Gejayan's Calling) has served as an umbrella for a number of mass actions, where university students, CSOs, and local activists respond to national politics. These include *Reformasi Dikorupsi* (Reformasi Being Corrupted), *Indonesia Gelap* (Indonesia in Darkness) rallies, politicization of elections, and, lately, the Reset Indonesia uprising in August 2025, responding to the parliament policies and police brutality. As a city of students, Yogyakarta— along with such other cities as Jakarta, Bandung and Surabaya— is often seen as a barometer for national democratic struggles.

In contrast, rural and peri-urban areas are characterized by civic struggles centered on land ownership, agrarian reform, and environmental degradation. These issues are closely tied to local elites and development agendas, increasing the social and political risks associated with contestation. In Kulon Progo, according to the LBH report, the issues of illegal mining are addressed by arresting around 17 local people who allegedly worked in the site for survival, without addressing the elites behind the mining operation. In Gunung Kidul, people who lived in Sultanate land for generations were displaced when the Palace gave a private company a licence to develop Sanglen Beach complex for premium tourist destinations (LBH, 2024, WALHI 2025). In Sleman, illegal sand mining in the Mount Merapi conservation area is not only posing environmental threats but also creating a corrupt structure resulting in potential loss of state revenue, estimated at IDR 3 trillion in the past two years alone (CNN 2025a).

This differentiation, as further discussed in the following chapter, highlights the uneven distribution of civic spacetime, where some actors can mobilize relatively openly while others face heightened vulnerability and risks of repression. These dynamics shape civic spacetime and the complexity of advocacy. Engagement on land, housing, and environmental justice issues often requires prolonged legal processes, sustained community organizing, and continuous negotiation, increasing the time and resource burden and risks on civil society actors.

Civic Spacetime as Structured Arena of Contestation

While overt repression is relatively limited in Yogyakarta, civic spacetime is shaped by informal political sensitivities. Issues closely associated with the Sultanate, spatial planning, and large-scale development projects are widely perceived by civil society actors as sensitive and difficult to contest openly.

As a structured arena of contestation, civic spacetime here is constructed and maintained through a distinct legal framework, governance structure and cultural repertoire that produce the paradoxical status of the Sultanate — as culturally legitimate and politically stabilizing yet limiting vibrant civic engagement and democratic struggles. It is not surprising when most respondents concluded that freedom of expression ends when it comes to criticizing development projects associated with the Sultanate, making it as the frontiers of activism not to be crossed.

Nevertheless, political exceptionalism that constitutes distinct characters of civic spacetime in this area does not necessarily mean totally limiting vibrant democratic struggles and civic engagement. Our findings demonstrate that organized movements and civic engagement as response to national issues are generally free and conducive. Moreover, as shown in the case of 1998 Reformasi and, recently, the 2025 August uprising triggered by police brutality, the presence of the Sultan in such democratic moments has elevated his image as pro-democracy figure and *pengayom* (the protector and savior) of the people – further strengthening political and cultural legitimacy. For CSOs/CSAs, this specific character of civic spacetime creates self-censorship mechanisms in defining and/or avoiding the issues of movement and areas of contestation.

Furthermore, public order regulations and tourism-oriented urban management practices have increasingly limited the use of symbolic public spaces for collective expression, particularly in central areas such as Malioboro – treated as a strategic and vital object. While public demonstrations are not formally prohibited, the assessment finds that CSOs/CSAs have been subject to heightened scrutiny and social pressures that discourage visible forms of contestation.

These situations intensified following the nationwide protests last August, during which risks of surveillance, legal sanction, and other forms of repression became more pronounced. According to a press conference by *Gerakan Muda Lawan Kriminalisasi* (Youth Movement Against Criminalization), 652 individuals – predominantly young activists – were reportedly subject to criminalization in connection with the August protests. Of these, 523 were arrested, 88 were convicted, 17 were released or granted bail, one individual died, and the status of 24 individuals remains unknown (GMLK 2026).

In fact, recent regulatory and socio-political constraints have not completely eliminated civic actions but reconfigured how it is expressed. Rather than relying on overt and confrontational forms of protest, CSOs/CSAs increasingly adopt indirect strategies and alternative repertoires of engagement, while new actors emerge in the public arena.

One notable development is the growing involvement of *emak-emak* (mothers) in demonstrations in Yogyakarta and other Indonesian cities. These mobilizations have included protests against militarized approaches to public policy, particularly in relation to the government's free-meal program for students, following repeated incidents of food poisoning (CNN 2025b). The participation of these actors – previously perceived as largely apolitical – may reduce immediate risks of repression due to prevailing gendered and moral norms. At the same time, their visibility contributes to broader processes of depatriarchalizing civic activism by challenging conventional boundaries between the private and political spheres.

CoDA: Assessing Civic Spacetime

The Yogyakarta context illustrates why assessing civic spacetime requires moving beyond formal indicators of civil liberties and institutional design. Political exceptionalism under *keistimewaan*, persistent socio-economic inequalities, development trajectories oriented towards tourism and urban branding, and entrenched cultural norms interact in complex ways, producing a distinct civic spacetime. This civic spacetime can be understood as a structured arena of contestation, in which opportunities for participation are unevenly distributed and continuously negotiated.

The relative embeddedness of these structural conditions significantly shapes the constellation of agency among CSOs/CSAs, the issues they prioritize, the strategies they deploy, and the outcomes of political struggles. However, civic spacetime is not determined solely by structural factors. It is also actively produced and transformed through everyday civic engagement, routine negotiations with authority, and ongoing struggles over meaning, visibility, and access to space and time.

While CoDA incorporates structural dimensions in monitoring civic spacetime, it places particular emphasis on the democratic agential power of CSOs/CSAs. This includes their capacity to build and sustain movements, adapt to shifting constraints, and contest oppressive structures and anti-democratic social forces. In this regard, the Yogyakarta case reinforces the importance of examining the following interrelated issues in characterising and shaping the three pillars of CoDA's civic spacetime assessment — connect, defend, and act:

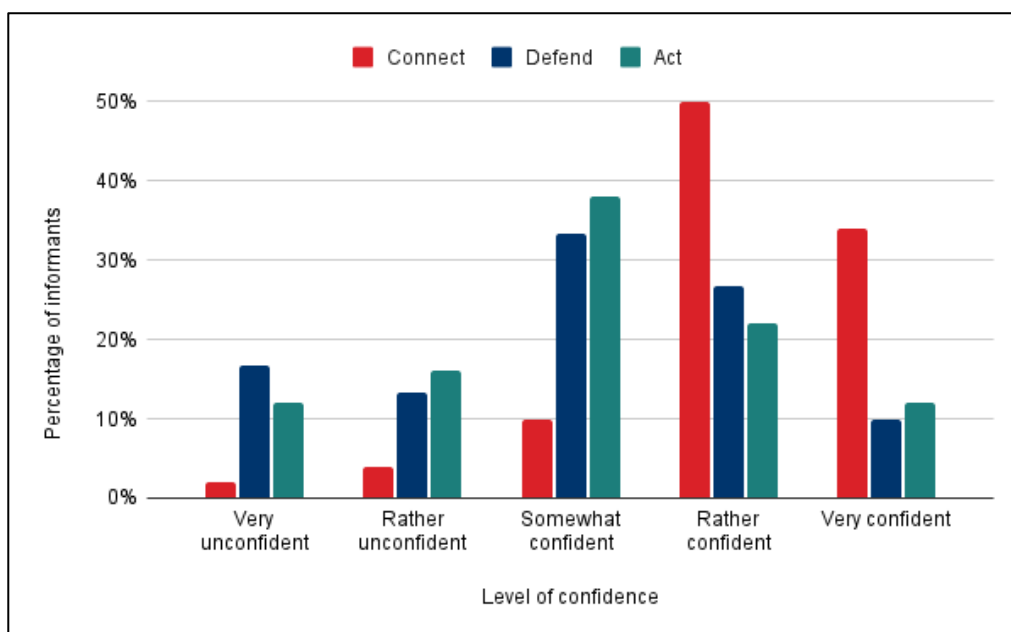
- How economic precarity and inequality affect the time, resources, and risks associated with civic engagement
- How political sensitivities and exceptional governance arrangements reshape the forms and boundaries of contestation
- How development agendas intersect with, and at times constrain, civic freedoms
- How civic spacetime is experienced unevenly across social groups and geographic locations

Together, these dimensions underscore the need for a contextualised and nuanced approach to assessing civic spacetime, one that captures both structural constraints and the adaptive capacities of civic actors. Our findings, presented in the following chapter, detail these complexities and dynamics of civic spacetime in Yogyakarta.

Overcoming Fragmentations, Vulnerabilities, and Ineffectiveness

Already pitted against harsh structural conditions, Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs would need extra wits to navigate their “perfect storm” of a shrinking civic spacetime – one that is nested within the third wave of global autocratization, the nationwide crackdown against CSOs/CSAs, and the local context of *keistimewaan* (special political status, where governorship is automatically held by the Sultan and passed hereditarily). Throughout our first round of civic spacetime monitoring, Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs reflected on how their civic spacetime had shrunk rapidly over the last five years, as well as on how they have been fragmented, vulnerable, and ineffective in outsmarting and outlasting autocratic actors. As illustrated in Figure 9, our 50 informants shared that they are confident in their capacities to connect with one another, but not in their capacities to defend and act in an effective manner.

Figure 9. Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs' Self-assessment of Their Capacities to Connect, Defend, Act



A Shrunk Civic Spacetime

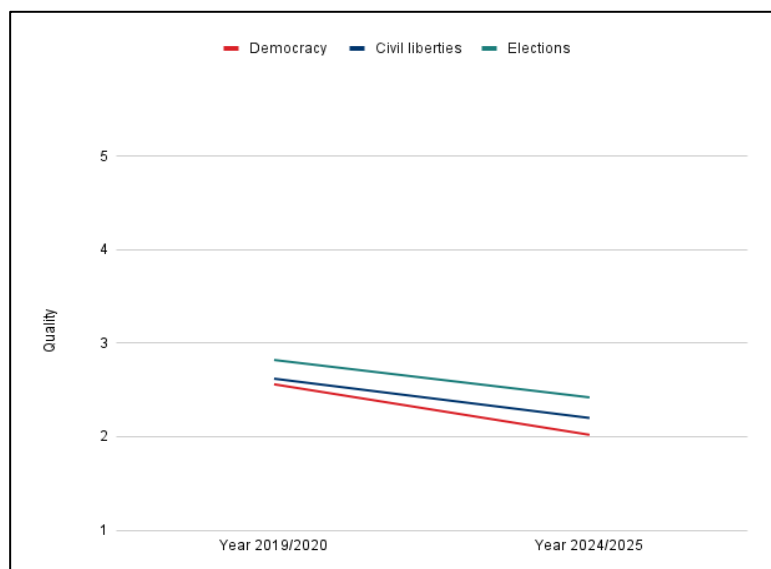
As highlighted in CDA’s baseline study for Indonesia, the ways in which autocratic actors shrunk Indonesia’s civic spacetime can be collated according to the seven strategies listed in *The Authoritarian Playbook*, a publication by [Protect Democracy](#). These strategies include politicizing independent institutions, spreading disinformation, aggrandizing executive power, quashing criticism and dissent, scapegoating vulnerable

and marginalized communities, corrupting elections, and stoking violence. Our interviews, focus group discussions, mapping exercise, and desk research confirm that all seven are present, albeit to a differing degree, in Yogyakarta.

Civil Liberties, Elections, and Democracy: Then and Now

When asked to score the quality of Indonesia’s civil liberties, elections, and democracy circa the 2019 and 2024 elections, on average, our informants painted a decline. As shown in Figure 10, the quality of elections is considered better compared to that of civil liberties, which decline is steeper. Here, it is important to note that for each category, the starting score is already lower than the midpoint (3). This reflects our informants’ understanding that autocratization has indeed started during Joko Widodo’s second presidential term, or even earlier.

Figure 10. Average Scores of Democracy, Civil Liberties, and Elections 2019/2020 vs 2024/2025



Note: 1 (very bad), 2 (bad), 3 (neutral), 4 (good), 5 (very good).

One-fifth of our informants highlight that, while the autocratic actors may have changed since the New Order and under Joko Widodo’s administrations, their strategies, tactics, and conditions have remained largely the same. What changed is the blatantness of repression, to which informants used the terms “*ugal-ugalan*” (reckless), “*terang-terangan*” (openly), “*gamblang*” (plain), “*lebih berani*” (braver), and vulgar. Such attitudes, of being undeterred by the ethical and political ramifications of violence, led to informants being “*lelah*” (drained), “*waspada*” (cautious), and “*takut*” (afraid).

Furthermore, our informants pointed at the various “*setting-an*” (extraordinary arrangements), “*pengkondisian*” (conditioning), “*campur tangan*” (meddling), and efforts to “*memperkeruh suasana*” (muddying) taking place throughout Joko Widodo’s

presidency. These include the 2023 Constitutional Court's decision that enabled Joko Widodo's underaged son to run for—and eventually assume—the vice presidency, as well as the mobilization of village heads as vote gatherers in the 2024 election.

While not having problems assertively challenging national-level injustices and repressions, Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs show more restraint when engaging in certain local issues. Aware that bringing up such issues would lead to polarizations and vigilantism, Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs perpetuate a culture of silence. As mentioned by an informant:

“On issues related to national politics, Yogyakarta authorities tend to protect us, e.g., by providing physical spaces to hold demonstrations. However, when it comes to land issues, those very authorities, the Sultan-cum-governor as well as the deputy governor, become our adversaries. This makes land a highly sensitive issue, which many parties, including academics and cultural leaders, are unwilling to speak out about.”

Here, it is important to underline that when a fundamental civil-political right, such as electing one's governor, is not fulfilled, the attainment of other rights cannot be guaranteed. As mentioned by an informant:

“Since Yogoyakartans have no say on who should become their leader, there is no control over the local government [and policies]. Thus, the provincial minimum wage remains low, public transportation is inadequate...”

When asked which issues deserve the most attention, the majority of our informants point at land ownership and land management. The enforced "Sultan Ground" arrangement, in which certain lands cannot be sold, leased, and/or used without the Sultanate's blessings, limits the spaces for Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs, not only in terms of engaging with activism, but also in conducting their day-to-day activities. Citizens have to pay rent to the Sultanate to operate their business, to manage the land for public use, and even to live on these lands. Moreover, the ownership and building rights are discriminatory towards citizens with Chinese descent, where they are not allowed to own land.

Sultan Ground has led to privatization of public spaces for mass tourism and extractive industries, where land is opened up for foreign or national investors. Offering relatively low operational costs, Yogyakarta attracts big corporations to set up branches in the province. While this may elevate the local revenue (*pendapatan asli daerah*), it is perceived to have exacerbated economic inequality in Yogyakarta. By operating in Yogyakarta, corporations spiked up the price of property and the cost of living, widening the gap between those who can and cannot afford them. Those who are already vulnerable are further harmed.

Obviously, land issues—disputes, displacements, discrimination, etc.—significantly contribute to shrinking civic spacetime in Yogyakarta. CSOs/CSAs become (overly) preoccupied with securing their livelihoods. Since they have to allocate extra time just to be able to fulfil their basic needs and rights, they have less time to do civic work. Clearly, the most politically sensitive issues deserve the most attention. Yet, despite such interlinkages, CSOs/CSAs in Yogyakarta still shy away from calling out the elephant in the room.

Civic Spacetime: Space for Expression, Not Necessarily Contestation

On the one hand, Yogyakarta has a vibrant civil society scene and records. On the other hand, the imposition of a culture of “harmony” amidst structural poverty and inequality produces a condition within which Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs might be free to express certain ideas, opinions, and aspirations, including for a sufficient livelihood, but *cannot go further beyond that*.

Arguably, such a condition shapes Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs’ definitions of civic spacetime. A majority of our informants think of it only in terms of spatiality (not necessarily including the time element) and in relation to “expression” and “livelihood” (not necessarily involving contestation). This suggests that, for Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs, civic spacetime is not an arena for political confrontation, particularly not along vertical lines. Moreover, it also suggests that they perceive “connect,” “defend,” and “act” rather technically than ideologically, limiting the imagination of civic spacetime as the space and time to contest for a better collective future.

Such a limited conception that excludes the element of time risks neglecting collective care, which is central to the endurance of civic work. Meanwhile, a narrow conception that excludes contestation potentially locks CSOs/CSAs into positive and optimistic views vis-à-vis the state. Borrowing Chambers and Kopstein’s (2006) categories of civil society, Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs are more likely to see themselves either in *dialogue*, in *support of*, or in *partnership* with the state. Meanwhile, borrowing Keane & Merkel’s (2019) functions of civil society, one-third of our informants see themselves taking the roles of “opening up effective channels for generating, aggregating, and articulating common values beyond political parties and parliaments,” while another quarter see themselves “supporting democratic-participatory socialization of citizens and the recruitment of democratic elites for state decision-making bodies.”

Interestingly, our informants did not emphasize on roles more closely related to “connect” and “defend.” These include “bridging deeper societal cleavages and thus help mitigating social conflicts,” “civilizing and democratizing local authoritarian enclaves (including training and education on civil liberties, elections, and democracy,” as well as “protecting against state intervention.”)

If anything, the above data suggest that Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs tend to *bring activism to the state*, rather than *direct activism against the state* — amongst others, by strengthening capacities to push back against the state’s encroachment into civic spacetime.

Connect

Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs feel confident about their capacities to connect with one another. Nevertheless, they are also aware of the fragmentations amongst them, which make building coalitions and alliances challenging. Of our 50 informants, 37 see

themselves as being very well connected or well connected, and have collaborated with both local and national CSOs/CSAs. When probed further, said collaborations were more frequently and intensively done with sister organizations in other cities, through various consortia, as well as with CSOs/CSAs working at the national level, including donor organizations. Only more recently have Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs put extra efforts in meaningfully networking with one another, e.g., through Forum Cik Di Tiro.

On top of having to overcome fragmentation, Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs face the challenge of bringing more individuals, communities, and organizations to the civic spacetime line-up. Amidst autocratic actors actively bringing as many persons to their side — through co-optation, disinformation, etc. — Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs cannot afford to be picky or exclusionary in forming their line-up.

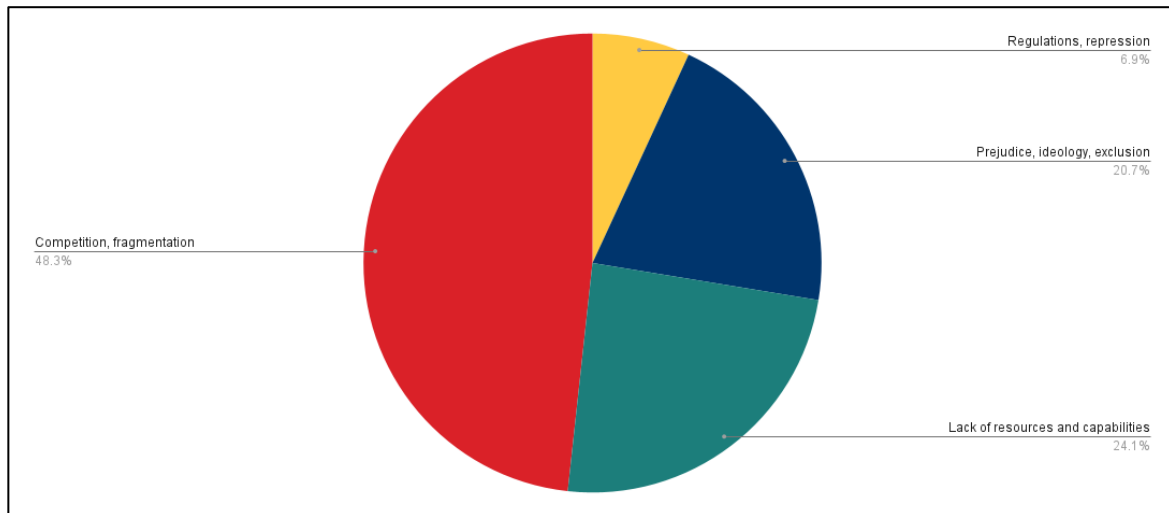
Linked, Yet Fragmented

Links amongst Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs seem to be issue-driven. Nearly half of our informants mentioned that they engage with others through the issues of human rights and democracy. Slightly over a quarter of our informants link up with others through the issues of development, land, environment, and climate. Meanwhile, the rest work with others on issues pertaining to identities and minorities. To a certain extent, their collaborations are reactive towards proposed policies and bills, e.g., the construction of New Yogyakarta International Airport (NYIA), the emasculation of the Corruption Eradication Committee, the passing of the Omnibus Law for Job Creation, the revision of Military Law, and the imposition of *Makan Bergizi Gratis* (free lunch at schools; henceforth MBG). In other words, collaborations mostly center around tactically resisting opponents' advances, rather than strategically re-imagining and bringing about desired civic spacetime.

In a mapping exercise, our informants laid out who works with whom on which issues, who takes the lead, and/or who serves as the hub. Two organizations and one network stand out: Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Yogyakarta (Yogyakarta Legal Aid, henceforth LBH Yogyakarta), Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Yogyakarta (Friends of Earth Yogyakarta, henceforth WALHI Yogyakarta), and Forum Cik Di Tiro. Said mapping confirms what has been shared in the interviews: that CSOs/CSAs working on the same issues are at the same time competitors to one another, especially in securing funding.

As can be seen in Figure 11, nearly half of our informants noted that competitions and fragmentations are indeed the main obstacles to bridging Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs. About a quarter of informants contend that it is more because there is a lack of resources and capabilities. A fifth of informants point at social attitudes, including prejudice and ideologies. Only a few respondents blame state regulation and repression for making it difficult for Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs to connect meaningfully.

Figure 11. What are the obstacles to bridging CSAs/CSOs in Yogyakarta?



The above data shows that what hinders meaningful connections amongst Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs are relational matters, rather than outside pressure. Our informants indeed noted a degree of siloization in their everyday work. On the one hand, this can be attributed to technical and programmatic matters. On the other hand, it may be more ideological, e.g., on how to conduct business with the government. As one informant remarked:

“Some CSOs/CSAs want to engage with the government, others have no interest at all, and this leads to polarization. Mediating and moderating such differences become important because, whether we like it or not, for good policies to be enacted, we need to have allies who engage with the government. Those who refuse to engage with the government can take the role of bad cop. There needs to be some back and forward dancing.”

Missing Actors, Missing Links

When asked who needs to be pulled into the civic spacetime line up, nearly half of our informants point at individuals from the general public. These may include students, parents, teachers, taxi drivers, farmers, fisherpersons, religious clerics, artists, and such, taking on civic work due to a personal calling, not necessarily as part of a cohort. Some informants were perplexed that not as many students showed up in demonstrations against tuition hike or not as many mothers turned up in protests against MBG. Also, the Yogyakarta chapter of Aksi Kamisan – the nationwide weekly picketing on Thursdays demanding the end of impunity of human rights violation – does not always see massive turnouts.

Some informants point at the need to include vulnerable, marginalized, and/or minority groups. On the matter, one respondent cautioned against repeating the 2016 exclusions of said groups. Back then, Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs were quite united in stopping the construction of NYIA. As part of their divide and conquer tactics, autocratic actors then

stigmatised SOGIESC minorities, Papuans, and survivors of the 1965 genocide to the extent that they become targets of threats and violent acts by vigilante groups. Obviously, CSOs/CSAs had to split their time and attention between protesting against NYIA and defending the targeted minorities. Eventually, and appallingly, a decision was made, in the name of the greater good, to exclude SOGIESC minorities and Papuans from the coalition as they were seen as “*mengganggu perjuangan bersama*” (impeding collective struggles).

Other informants reminded of the need to always center their work around grassroots communities, which is not always easy. As one informant observes:

“There is a mismatch between the issues raised by CSOs/CSAs and actual needs at the grassroots level. For example, while we talk more and more about energy transition and climate crises, they do not seem to really alleviate the everyday hardships juggled by people.”

Time as Currency

It should be acknowledged that many CSOs/CSAs, not to mention the general public, take on civic work — promoting civil liberties, elections, and democracy — as a “side job” on top of their full-time jobs and familial roles. Only one-tenth of our informants are fully paid for engaging in civic work, while nearly half informants do so pro bono, and the rest only partially remunerated. This becomes a disadvantage on its own compared to many autocratic actors eroding democracy as their full-time paid job. Looping back to the fact that Yogyakarta has the worst Gini index nationwide and a huge discrepancy between minimum wage and living costs, time becomes a precious and precarious currency in sustaining livelihoods.

It should be further noted that Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs feel overwhelmed by bureaucratization and/or professionalization in various sectors — NGO, education, journalism, etc. — where they feel drowned by administrative tasks. About two-thirds of our informants spend more than three-quarters of their time engaging in administrative work, e.g., in the form of campus accreditation, NGO paperwork, financial reports, etc. Only one-fifth of our informants reported a decline in administrative work. Two-fifth experienced an increase in said work, and another two-fifth shared that their load has been as overwhelming as ever.

Another important time element is the notion of temporality, where students and tourists whom the province’s economy mainly cater to only live in Yogyakarta for a short period of time. Given constant tuition hikes as well as tempting exchange and internship programs, students are systematically incentivized to invest more of their time and energy for personal development rather than civic work. Compounded with the fact that students live in Yogyakarta for only four to five years, sustainable recruitment and regeneration of activists becomes even more challenging. Even CSOs are sometimes limited by the scope and duration of their projects.

Our informants are in consensus that brokering relations as well as building coalitions and alliances amongst Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs are tolling, time-wise and emotion-wise. Obviously, said tasks are not remunerated and are often invisibilized. They often involve unequal contributions, potentially deepening the existing fragmentations. Altogether, our informants highlight difficulties in finding the time and energy to consolidate with other CSO/CSAs, which may lead to movements and activism becoming unorganized.

Defend

While confident in their skills to connect with one another, Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs are rather unsure about their capacities to defend against attacks. The majority of our informants shared that they have completed training on Holistic Safety and Security (HSS) or digital security, as well as developed safety procedures within their circles. Yet, they expressed the need for more training and other forms of support. If anything, the new and escalated forms of attacks highlight the need for stress-testing the procedures and support systems.

Apart from building individual and institutional capacities, another important strategy adopted by Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs to ensure safety has been avoiding direct criticism towards the province's *keistimewaan*. They would go around the issue or redirect their work towards national and global issues.

Vulnerable, Yet Undeterred

In general, Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs do not feel completely safe in performing their civic duties. As shown in Figure 12, 25 out of 50 informants feel very unsafe or rather unsafe, 14 informants feel very safe or rather safe, while 11 informants feel somewhat in the middle. Nearly half of them feel that their safety deteriorated, and a third of them feel their safety was as bad as before. About two-thirds of our informants have had themselves or someone close to them being at the receiving end of physical attacks, while three-quarters of them have had themselves or someone close to them experiencing digital attacks.

As shared by our informants, most physical attacks in Yogyakarta took the form of intimidation, from receiving suspicious packages and food from unknown senders to being followed by unknown individuals. Nevertheless, the most notable physical attacks in Yogyakarta included the throwing of Molotov cocktail to the office of LBH Yogyakarta (Yogyakarta Legal Aid) in 2021, the mass mobilizations to shut down Al-Fatah transgender madrasa in 2016, the 2016 intimidation towards Papuan students, as well as the suspension of the 2016 *Buru Tanah Air Beta* movie discussion and the 2012 *Allah, Liberty, and Love* book discussion. In the digital realm, the most common forms of digital attacks were hacking, intimidating calls and messages — directed to the activists

themselves or their family members – doxxing, and website attack/DDoS. As seen in Figure 13, our informants shared that the actors most likely to disturb civic life are the police, vigilante groups, thugs, and the military.

Figure 12. How safe do you feel in performing civil society, election, and democracy-related work?

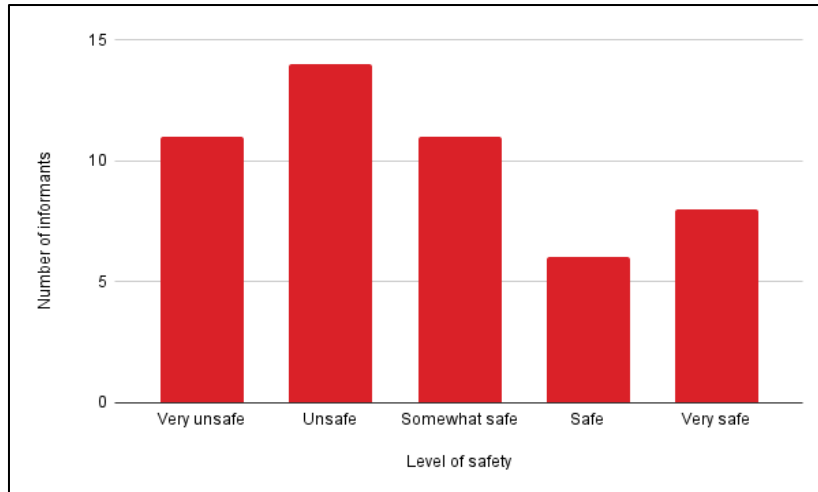
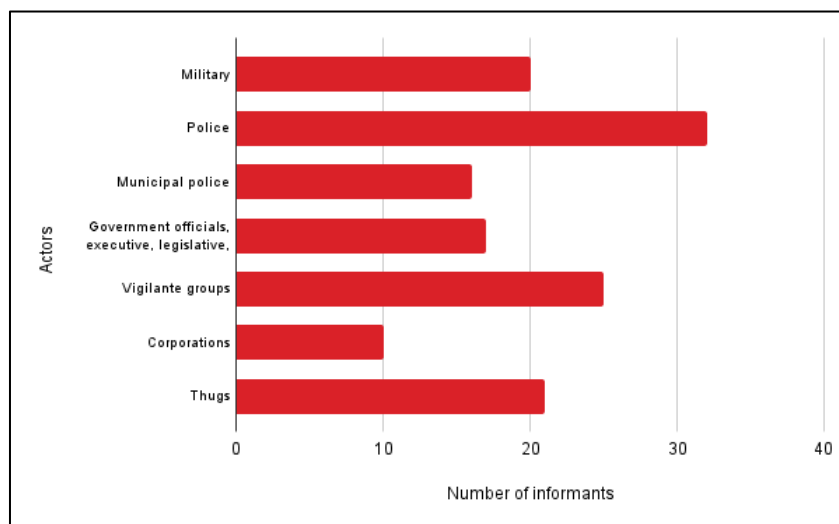


Figure 13. Which actors are most likely to disturb your civil liberty, election, and democracy-related work?



Said attacks did not deter Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs from participating in massive demonstrations. The most prominent of them were the series of Gejayan Memanggil (2019, 2020, 2021, 2024), Indonesia Darurat (2024), Indonesia Gelap (2025), and Reset Indonesia (2025), each organized around the nationwide call against autocratization. Following the Reset Indonesia uprisings, attacks towards CSOs/CSAs escalated, thus defending became more challenging. During the demonstrations in front of the Yogyakarta Provincial Police Office, Rheza Shendy Pratama (student, 21 years old) was

killed and 29 others were hospitalized. Subsequently, as part of a nationwide crackdown by the police, Syahdan Husein (media coordinator of Gejayan Memanggil, 30 years old), Perdana Arie Veriasa (student, 20 years old) and Muhammad Fakhrurozi (NGO worker, 27 years old) were arbitrarily arrested and charged for protesting or using social media in support of the protests. Also, a book discussion was surveilled after refusing to cancel the event altogether.

In light of the above suppression, Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs remain undeterred. Skillfully, they weave-in social injustice issues into everyday narratives and satirical humour. Without necessarily mobilizing people to the streets, they intensify offline and online conversations, e.g., on how MBG erodes women's authority over their kitchen, how the disasters in North Sumatra and Aceh are man-made, how young people have been criminalized for speaking up their minds, etc.

Direct, Structural, and Cultural

Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs understand well that they need to fend off not only direct attacks – both physical and digital – but also those that seep rather quietly into the very structures and cultures that shape their civic life. Structurally, Yogyakarta has no gubernatorial elections, has enacted a regulation that forbids protests on its main road where key governmental offices are located, and has an economy that caters more to the needs of visitors – tourists and students alike – which is dependent on its image being calm and harmonious. Culturally, it is taboo to speak ill about the Sultan, who is also the governor whose blessings and policies underpin various development projects that eventually undermine people's right to a dignified living space.

It seems that Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs have an ambivalent relationship with the Sultanate. On the one hand, a number of civic spacetime challenges are connected to Yogyakarta's special political-economic arrangements. On the other hand, there is a romanticisation of the Sultanate's pivotal role in the late 1990s democratisation. His strong support for students' demonstration against Suharto has kept the province relatively safe against police and military encroachments in comparison to other major cities in Indonesia.

That said, it is rather unsurprising that Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs choose to tread lightly when it comes to *keistimewaan*, Sultan ground, and *kraton* (the royal family and palace). A number of informants confirmed the open secret that failure to self-restrain in said matters is usually met with harsh – sometimes violent – responses from vigilante groups. Expressions of *sendika dhawuh* (your wish is my command) and *narima ing pandum* (grateful of what has been allocated) reflect the entrenched reluctance to openly engage in the Sultanate-related issues. Other than that, some informants pointed that several issues such as the 1965 genocide, rights of SOGIESC minorities, and *Proyek Strategis Nasional* (strategic national development projects) tend to be avoided. This is perhaps why Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs are more assertive and relentless in raising demands pertaining to national politics and the general state of democracy.

Collective Carework as Key Infrastructure

Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs understand that, unfortunately, their capacities to safeguard and defend against attacks depend on the time, energy, and emotional capacities left upon performing their core and administrative tasks. While they agree that collective carework should be the very infrastructure holding activism together, they realize that putting it in place takes time and energy on its own, not to mention a change of mindset.

When asked what care and collective care look like, our informants provided a wide variety of answers, mostly around *ngewongke* (humanizing and rehumanizing). This includes not feeling guilty for not always being able to show up, for taking breaks, for prioritizing familial matters, for establishing financial security, and such. This also includes a peace of mind in knowing that others have their back when push comes to shove, without them having to demand for it.

All of our informants mentioned that they have access to legal aid and that most of them have IT support. What is still lacking is financial support writ large, from organizational funding sustainability, to individual take home pay, emergency funds, and such.

Act

While confident about their capacities to connect and unsure about their capacities to defend, Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs have a mixed assessment on their capacities to act — that is, to effectively push back against shrinking civic spacetime. A majority of our informants are disheartened by the fact that there have been no meaningful changes despite persistent advocacy work, campaigns, and protests. If anything, it feels like civic spacetime has shrunk more rapidly than ever.

Forceful, Yet Ineffective

Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs consider themselves creative and persistent in advancing social justice issues, which includes defending against shrinking civic spacetime. From the 1997 student demonstrations, to the annual Women's Marches, the series of Gejayan Memanggil mobilizations, and the more recent Reset Indonesia uprising, Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs always show up in numbers, on the streets, for massive nationwide protests. On local issues, they organized series of campaigns against land grabbing (e.g., *Yogya Ora Didol* [Yogyakarta Not for Sale]; *Tolak NYIA* [Stop the Construction of NYIA]), water grabbing (e.g., *Yogya Asat* [Yogyakarta Dried Out]), and forced relocations (e.g., *Tolak Relokasi PKL Malioboro* [Stop Relocation of Malioboro street vendors]). They even lend their time and resources to work with land grabbing survivors in neighboring provinces, (e.g., Save Wadas campaign in Purworejo, Central Java). Often, said issues are weaved into the Yogyakarta-chapter of Aksi Kamisan. In the aftermath of Reset Indonesia

uprisings, a number of local protests were led by mothers. Centering around MBG, they underline how the program is top-down, militaristic, wasteful, and allegedly corruption-ridden as well as all those are feminist issues.

Nearly all our informants shared that they had participated in street protests. They take pride in the collective efforts by Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs to depatriarchalize sites of protests. Among others, they provide hotlines for sexual harassment, ensure safe space for people with disabilities, children, and sexual minorities, as well as have women as speakers, march coordinators, safety officers, etc.

In addition to taking bodies to the streets, Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs have also been adept at taking art to the streets. For every new local, national, and global (e.g., genocide against Palestinians) issue, there are always new murals and posters displayed throughout the cityscapes. When painted over or taken down by the authorities, Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs are quick to replace their protest messages with new artwork. A notable response to this was Gejayan Memanggil's "call for murals" where it invited CSOs/CSAs to put up their critiques around the city and see whose mural gets painted over the quickest by authorities.

Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs also take pride in their advocacy and capacity building works. Our informants mentioned that most CSOs/CSAs in Yogyakarta had one way or the other served as consultants for governments or corporations, or had even moved in and out of said sectors. They were then disillusioned: that their acquired networks and skills of navigating the state-society relations since the dawn of Reformasi did not automatically lend themselves to effective policy changes, especially throughout the last decade. In the words of one informant,

"Albeit reluctantly, we must admit that we (CSAs) have been somewhat co-opted by the state. We should rethink the strategy of bringing change from within."

Sanitization of Dissent

Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs learned the hard way that persistence and creativity are not enough to push back against shrinking civic spacetime. When asked what they think makes it difficult to effectively mobilize, our informants pointed at CSA/CSO fragmentation, concerted disinformation by buzzers, and an apolitical public. It can be said, though, that a deeper reason for ineffective activism is systematic sanitization of dissent.

As indicated in the "Defend" section, an important strategy taken by Yogyakarta CSOs/CSAs to ensure security is to avoid sensitive issues like *keistimewaan*. Obviously, this has an impact on how they "act" on local issues. Here, their civic works are way heavier on empowering and supporting survivors and underdogs, rather than on challenging the legitimacy and authority of perpetrators and top dogs. More than four-fifths of our informants shared that they have openly expressed solidarity with vulnerable, marginalized, and/or minority groups.

They have also extended services, such as providing shelter, emergency funds, legal aid, research, advocacy, education, etc to said groups – including the urban poor, farmers, sexual minorities, people with disabilities, religious minorities, people of Chinese descent, Papuans, etc. However, while such care work is obviously necessary, not combining it with more direct actions risks appeasing autocratic actors.

Figure 14. Who are the vulnerable, marginalized, and/or minority groups you have expressed solidarity with?

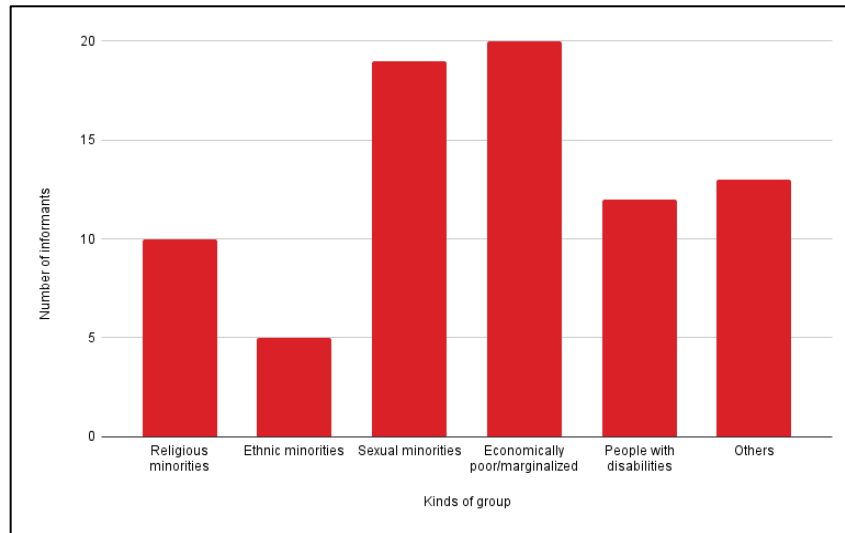
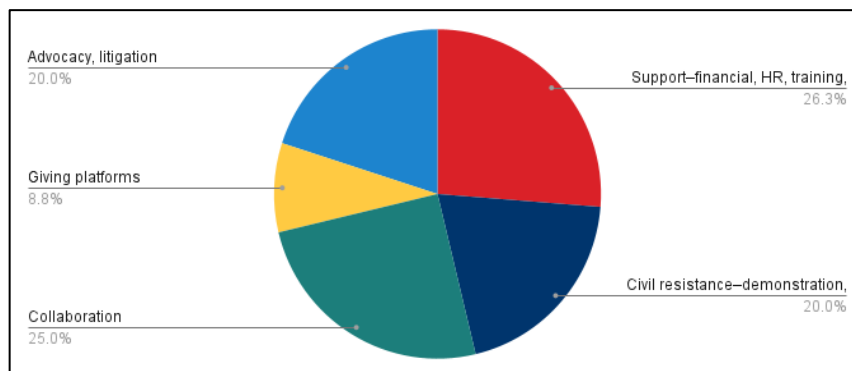


Figure 15. What are the forms of support you extend to vulnerable, marginalized, and/or minority groups?



Another mechanism as to how dissent has been sanitized is through systematic disinformation and distractions by buzzers. Informants share how careful and timely efforts to raise awareness on certain issues of injustice can be quickly thwarted by stigmatization of survivors, glorification of perpetrators, and such. Disinformation contributes to large parts of the population being apolitical. But as the protest waves in 2025 have shown, bread and butter issues, such as price hike and increased unemployment, as well as insensitive gestures from allegedly corrupt and/or nepotist politicians, can gain quite some traction.

Too Late? Wargame!

Given the growing unresponsiveness of Indonesian political institutions to citizens' inputs and participation, civil resistance has become one of the remaining avenues for CSOs/CSAs to voice their demands and push back against autocratization. As highlighted above, all informants have engaged in some form of protest in recent years. Many of them consider state repression and undermining of civil liberties as red lines, which, once crossed, would draw massive participation from the general public. Given recent events like the murder of motorcycle taxi driver Affan Kurniawan in August 2025, as well as the arrest of over 1,000 civilians following the Reset Indonesia uprisings, over 300 of them underaged, there has been some reflections amongst informants that a possible red line for wider civil resistance had likely already been crossed. Yet, the systematic sanitization of dissent inhibited widespread street protests.

It is important to underline that the repertoires of civil resistance in Indonesia have mainly relied on methods of protest and persuasion, which includes demonstrations, marches, and petitions (Sharp 1973, Kusumaningrum 2025). Only a few, e.g., those in solidarity with Palestinians, relied on methods of noncooperation such as boycotts and strikes, and also a few utilized methods of intervention such as occupations and blockades. Also, the civil resistance has been mostly reactive, where CSOs/CSAs react to governments' policies and actions and incidents, with little emphasis in developing and driving a more proactive agenda which anticipates the next steps likely to be taken by autocratic actors. In order to push back more effectively against autocratization — that is, to be able to impose the right dilemma actions on the right opponents at the right time — CSOs/CSAs need to engage in wargaming opponents' tactics and strategies.

References

- Argama, R., Oktaryal, A., Sabillah, A., Nugroho, E., Nursyamsi, F., Damayana, G.P., Poerba, J. and Rofiandri, R. (2022). *Laporan Studi: Pelindungan dan Perluasan Ruang Gerak Masyarakat Sipil (Civic Space): Menuju Perbaikan Kerangka Hukum untuk Kebebasan Berserikat dan Berkumpul, Berpendapat dan Berekspresi, serta Pelindungan Pembela HAM di Indonesia*. Jakarta: Pusat Studi Hukum dan Kebijakan Indonesia (PSHK). [online] Available at: <https://pshk.or.id/publikasi/pelindungan-dan-peluasan-ruang-gerak-masyarakat-sipil/>.
- Badan Pusat Statistik. (2025). [New Method] Aspect of Indonesia Democracy Index by Province, 2024. <https://www.bps.go.id/en/statistics-table/2/MjE2MCMY/-new-method--aspect-of-indonesia-democracy-index-by-province.html>.
- Badan Pusat Statistik. (2025). *Indeks Pembangunan Manusia (IPM) Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta tahun 2025*. Berita Resmi Statistik, No.70/11/34/Th. XXVII.
- Badan Pusat Statistik. (2025). *Profil Kemiskinan DI Yogyakarta Maret 2025*. Berita Resmi Statistik, No. 43/07/34/Th. XXVII.
- Chambers, S. and Kopstein, J. (2009). 'Civil Society and the State,' in J.S. Dryzek, B. Honig and A. Phillips (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199548439.003.0020>.
- CNN Indonesia. (2025). 'Tambang Ilegal Gunung Merapi: 3 Jadi Tersangka, Kerugian Rp3 Triliun,' *CNN Indonesia*, 4 November.
<https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20251104151359-12-1291785/tambang-ilegal-gunung-merapi-3-jadi-tersangka-kerugian-rp3-triliun>.
- CNN Indonesia. (2025). 'Ratusan Ibu di Jogja Aksi Pukul Panci Desak Setop MBG Militeristik,' *CNN Indonesia*, 26 September.
<https://app.cnnindonesia.com/https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20250926181030-20-1278186/ratusan-ibu-di-jogja-aksi-pukul-panci-desak-setop-mbg-militeristik>.
- Dresden, J., Baird, A., and Raderstorf, B. (2022). *The Authoritarian Playbook*. United States: Protect Democracy. [online] Available at: <https://protectdemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/The-Authoritarian-Playbook-Updated.pdf>.
- Fikri, F. F. & Ekaria. (2025). The Impact of Structural Change on Income Inequality in the Special Region of Yogyakarta Province. *Jurnal Ekonomi dan Pembangunan*, 33(1), <https://doi.org/10.55981/jep.2025.10203>.

- Gerakan Muda Lawan Kriminalisasi. (2026). *Kami Sudah Muak dengan Pembungkaman: Mengungkap Data Tahanan Politik dan Deklarasi Sikap atas Kriminalisasi Rakyat Agustus 2025 Se-Indonesia*. Press Conference.
- Hidayat, N., Makarim, M. & Nugroho, E. (2019). *Shrinking Civic Space in ASEAN Countries: Indonesia and Thailand*. Jakarta: Lokataru Foundation. [online] Available at: <https://lokataru.id/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/shrinking-space-asean-Country-2.pdf>
- JATAM. (2025). *HATAM 2025: Melawan Ekstraktivisme, Merawat Hidup, Menyatukan Perlawanan*. [online] Jakarta: Jaringan Advokasi Tambang. Available at: <https://jatam.org/id/lengkap/Hari-Anti-Tambang-2025>.
- Keane, John & Merkel, Wolfgang. (2019). 'Civil Society,' in Wolfgang Merkel, Raj Kollmorgen, and Hans-Jürgen Wagene (eds.), *The Handbook of Political, Social, and Economic Transformation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198829911.001.0001>.
- Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria. (2024). *Dekade Krisis Agraria: Warisan Nawacita dan Masa Depan Reforma Agraria Pasca Perubahan Politik 2024*. [online] Jakarta: Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria. Available at: <https://www.kpa.or.id/publikasi/dekade-krisis-agraria-warisan-nawacita-dan-masa-depan-reforma-agraria-pasca-perubahan-politik-2024/>.
- kusumaningrum, d. (2025). 'Indonesia 2024: The Dark Knights Rise,' in kusumaningrum, d., (ed.), *The World is Not Okay: Nonviolent Resistance in Indonesia and the World 2024* [Monograph], No 9/2025. Yogyakarta: Institute of International Studies, Universitas Gadjah Mada. [online] Available at: ugm.id/IISMonograph9.
- kusumaningrum, diah, Petz, D., Anindita, F.T., Handiani, D.S. and Puspitasari, N.K.D. (2024). *Outsmarting and Outlasting Autocratic Actors: A Baseline Study Report for Connect, Defend, Act!* Jakarta: Humanis Foundation. [online] Available at: https://humanis.foundation/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/CDA_Baseline-Study-Report-EN-.pdf.
- Prasetia, J. D., et al. (2025). *Catatan Akhir Tahun LBH Yogyakarta: Demokrasi Semu: Rakyat Dijagal, Hukum Dibegal*. Yogyakarta: LBH Yogyakarta.
- PurpleCode Collective. (2022). *CTRL + F + PRIVASI: Privasi di Ruang Tak Bertepi: Memakani Privasi melalui Kacamata Feminis*. PurpleCode Collective. [online] Available at: <https://web.tresorit.com/l/7VrLq#SoR9Zu5qWFY6m5c4yXKcNg&viewer=9cBC45bgA75dGCBfkOgHw9nSb9HcdQN3>.
- Rosyid, A., et al. (2023). *Catatan Akhir Tahun LBH Jakarta: Jalan Asa Demokrasi Di Negeri Oligarki*. Jakarta: LBH Jakarta. [online] Available at: <https://bantuanhukum.or.id/catatan-akhir-tahun-lbh-jakarta-jalan-asa-demokrasi-di-negara-oligarki/>.

- Royani, A. D. & Retnosari, L. (2025). 'Upah minimum dan tantangan pemenuhan hidup layak di DIY,' Antara News, 30 December.
<https://www.antaranews.com/berita/5326600/upah-minimum-dan-tantangan-pemenuhan-hidup-layak-di-diy?page=all>.
- SAFENet (2025). *Laporan Organisasi 2024: Menyalakan Energi di Tengah Represi*. [online] Denpasar: Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network. [online] Available at: <https://safenet.or.id/id/2025/07/laporan-organisasi-2024-menyalakan-energi-di->
- Satu Data Ketenagakerjaan. (2026). *Upah Minimum Provinsi (UMP) Tahun 2026*.
<https://satudata.kemnaker.go.id/data/kumpulan-data/3005>.
- Sharp, G. (1973). *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*. Boston: Porter Sargent.
- Sutanto, T.S., Asfinawati, Ali-Fauzi, I., Maufur, Cholil, S. and Bagir, Z.A. (2024). *Ketegangan Kebebasan dan Kerukunan Beragama di Indonesia: Telaah Sejarah, Politik, dan Hukum*. 1st ed. PUSAD Paramadina. [online] Available at: <https://www.paramadina-pusad.or.id/buku/ketegangan-kebebasan-dan-kerukunan-beragama-di-indonesia-telaah-sejarah-politik-dan-hukum/>.
- WALHI. (2016). *36 Tahun, WALHI Memanggil untuk Menyelamatkan Lingkungan Hidup dan Kemanusiaan*. Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia. [online] Available at: <https://www.walhi.or.id/36-tahun-walhi-memanggil-untuk-menyelamatkan-lingkungan-hidup-dan-kemanusiaan>.
- WALHI. (2025). *Tujuh Dekade Warga Mengelola: Kraton Baru Hadir Dan Menghapus Sejarah Rakyat Demi Kepentingan Investor Di Pantai Sanglen*. Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia. <https://walhijogja.or.id/tujuh-dekade-warga-mengelola-kraton-baru-hadir-dan-menghapus-sejarah-rakyat-demi-kepentingan-investor-di-pantai-sanglen/>.