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## Civic engagement in the perspective of citizenship towards civil society

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**Abstract:** Civic engagement—encompassing social awareness, volunteerism, political participation, activism, and communal solidarity—is an indispensable pillar of modern nationhood. Such proactive involvement is non-negotiable for the preservation of democratic institutions and the construction of an equitable, robust civil society. Employing a rigorous literature review methodology, this study critically analyses peer-reviewed journals, academic monographs, and institutional documents to synthesise existing theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence. This approach forcefully addresses prevailing methodological gaps to establish a solid conceptual foundation for subsequent analysis. Citizen engagement, whether through grassroots activism or formal political avenues, explicitly frames specific socio-political issues within the juridical parameters of citizenship—specifically, the reciprocal rights and obligations that bind the individual to the state. Furthermore, the collective mobilisation of communities demonstrates a clear capacity to shape public policy and secure equitable jurisprudential outcomes. Ultimately, this study asserts a comprehensive paradigm of civic engagement within the citizenship continuum, unequivocally elucidating the critical mechanisms required to achieve absolute participatory parity.

**Keywords:** Citizenship; Civil Society; Civic Engagement.

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## Introduction

A study of conceptual approaches and processes for developing a comprehensive framework for analysing citizen engagement from a citizenship perspective. This is important because citizen engagement enhances social cohesion and sustainability, enabling social and political relations to be structured to promote greater social stability and coherence. This study seeks to combine reality with more detailed empirical knowledge about the factors that drive citizen engagement and the extent of its impact on society, both in terms of voluntary activism and formal engagement. This engagement is non-utilitarian, meaning there is no direct personal gain for individuals. It can take the form of political participation, civil action in the private, public and civil spheres, and involvement in social movements. Thus, conceptually, citizen engagement encompasses all activities characterised by social equality, justice, sustainable social networks, inclusiveness, and cohesiveness. In this case, civic engagement represents the 'common good' within a democratic society.

Civic engagement is the concept of individual participation in activities aimed at influencing public policy, strengthening communities, and improving the quality of life in society (Gusmadi, 2018). In an increasingly complex and interconnected global context, civic engagement has become increasingly important. This includes not only participation in elections but also various activities such as volunteering, advocacy, and involvement in civil society organisations. This concept has become a focus of attention in many countries, especially in efforts to build stronger democracies and more just societies.

Citizen engagement should include a range of individual activities in the social sphere beyond voluntary work. This includes support for local activities, activism, participation in demonstrations, various forms of political action, and unpaid activities for the benefit of the wider community, local communities, society, or family life (Henriksen et al., 2008; Salamon & Sokolowski, 2016; Shachar et al., 2019, as cited in Lynggaard & Boje, 2025). Fraser (2005) describes the concept of 'participatory parity' as the struggle for equality in the distribution of economic resources, the acceptance of cultural diversity, citizen involvement in decision-making affecting citizens' lives, and increased opportunities for civic participation. However, in practice, Dekker (2009) notes that dynamics in the sphere of citizenship are normative. Therefore, active involvement, upholding politeness and inclusiveness make society more cohesive and solidary, and the approach to one another can be more egalitarian. In this case, ethical considerations are practically urgent in packaging citizen involvement in a more humanistic way.

Conceptually, Lynggaard & Boje (2025) state that citizenship provides citizens with rights and obligations; citizenship characterises support for social and political change and the way organisations practise equal access and socialisation in their relations with citizens, while politeness refers to virtue in manners. Therefore, the ethics of decency and citizenship are important concepts for understanding the essence of citizen engagement, building social networks and associations, and creating empowered relationships between citizens and institutions to foster a civil society.

One of the issues rooted in political polarisation is the strong indication of power intervention in the law in the case of Thomas Trikasih Lembong, alias Tom Lembong, which then had implications for the movement of public support and condemnation of the politicisation of law enforcement in Indonesia, which was so obvious. The final decision was to abolish the president's prerogative to resolve political-legal conflicts strategically.

In 2024, the government announced plans to increase the value-added tax (VAT) by 1 percentage point to 12 per cent (Putri, 2024). Finance Minister Sri Mulyani explained

that the 12 per cent VAT increase was in accordance with the mandate of Law Number 7 of 2021, which decided that VAT would be increased in stages. The public responded to this policy with rejection, including from several practitioners. According to economist Nailul Huda from the Centre for Economics and Law Studies (Tempo, 2024), implementing a 12 per cent VAT could reduce the public's disposable income. This is considered contradictory to economic growth. If implemented (the VAT rate increase), it will increase the vulnerability of household consumption. In the short term, it could disrupt the macroeconomy. Furthermore, the Chairperson of the Indonesian Employers Association (APINDO), Shinta Widjaja Kamdani, stated that implementing the VAT policy at this time risks suppressing domestic consumption. After the plan to increase VAT from 11 per cent to 12 per cent was rolled out, President Prabowo Subianto finally confirmed that the 12 per cent VAT increase would be imposed on luxury goods and services, namely certain goods and services that have been subject to luxury goods VAT, which are consumed by the affluent and wealthy segments of society.

From the legal events cited, we can see a pattern of citizen involvement, both in the form of activism and in a formal or structured manner through certain community organisations, as a manifestation of social dynamics within the framework of citizenship, relating to the legal relationship between an individual and the state, including their rights and obligations as citizens. Collective community movements as a form of citizen involvement are seen as having the potential to influence political policy and create fair legal decisions.

Civil society, as a space outside of government and the market, plays an important role in supporting civic engagement. Civil society includes non-governmental organisations, community groups, and various social initiatives that work to advance community interests. Through civil society, individuals can find a platform to express their opinions, fight for issues they consider important, and work with others to achieve common goals. Civic engagement is one of the main pillars in building a healthy and dynamic civil society.

The importance of civic engagement can be seen from various perspectives. First, from a democratic perspective, citizen involvement is an indicator of democracy's health. A strong democracy requires the active participation of its citizens; without this involvement, minority voices may be ignored, and public policies will not reflect society's needs and aspirations. Second, civic engagement contributes to inclusive social development. In an increasingly diverse society, citizen engagement can help bridge differences and create mutual understanding between groups.

On the other hand, there are challenges in encouraging civic engagement. In many countries, political apathy and distrust of public institutions are barriers to citizen involvement. In addition, access to the information and resources necessary to participate is also a determining factor. Therefore, it is important to understand the factors that influence civic engagement and find ways to increase community participation.

## Method

The research method used in this study is a *literature review*, which involves examining scientific sources such as journals, books, and relevant documents to gain a comprehensive understanding of the concepts, theories, and results of previous studies on the topic. This approach aims to identify findings and research gaps and to formulate a conceptual synthesis as a basis for further study. A *literature review* is a research method that collects previous studies containing theories and findings related to the study of *Civic Engagement* in the Perspective of Citizenship towards *Civil Society*, which are then evaluated for use as references in writing. By using a *literature review*, researchers can compile a comprehensive understanding of the literature they have read

and consolidate various information. The data sources in this study are divided into two categories: primary and secondary. Primary data sources are drawn from international and national journal articles that can produce *representative, holistic* studies. Other data sources are secondary. Secondary data sources are taken from books with relevant topics. Data analysis techniques involve data reduction, data presentation, and data verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

## Findings and Discussion

### The Civil Society Paradigm

Civil society in Indonesia is translated as *masyarakat sipil* (Shaker, 2014; Fitria, 2020). The study begins with Emanuel Kant's opinion that *civil society* is the goal (*telos*) of human beings who live according to the law and reject unification as part of absolute power (Hikam, 1999). Kant's statement suggests a separation between the state and civil society. This statement aligns with Hegel's view that the concepts of *civil society* and the state are not merely two distinct entities but also a synthesis or negation of opposing entities. However, Hegel attempts to combine these two entities into a new political formulation (synthesis), in which *civil society* is integrated into the state as a domain that must adjust its behaviour to the state's interests (Rahardjo, 1999).

In a realistic perspective, Gramsci sees civil society not in terms of economic domination, but in terms of political and cultural domination. This means that Gramsci's key concept is hegemony. Hegemony forms in civil society, not in the state. Gramsci argues that, to maintain the power of the dominant social class, it is inevitable to negotiate and make compromises with other social groups in the arena of civil society (Hikam, 1999).

Therefore, civil society is seen as an arena of hegemony; the main objective of strengthening it is to serve as an instrument to counter the state. Gramsci's explanation of civil society is not merely about accommodating individual interests; it also includes organisations that seek to serve the interests of the people. Civil society has the potential to regulate itself rationally and contains elements of freedom (Culla, 1999).

As it has developed, Alexander (2006) has proposed an understanding of civil society, namely that it must consist of a democratically and emancipatorily structured network that provides space for communicative interaction between citizens and ensures that participatory and democratic dialogue is the main principle supporting the development of public space (as cited in Lynggaard & Boje, 2025). Based on this understanding, civil society can be defined as a community in which individuals, regardless of race, gender, age, or status, can practise the ethics of courtesy, criticism, and solidarity. Furthermore, it is important to ensure that civil society practices align with democratic principles, with freedom of expression as a benchmark. However, conscious civil society involvement also includes various forms of social activities initiated by independently organised community groups to protest environmental damage and combat social injustice.

Community involvement also includes various forms of cooperation in informal activism networks (Lichterman, 2021). In most countries, these activities are even more widespread than formal volunteering (Ekman & Amna, 2012). Informal activism through local networks, etc., is very important for local community cohesion and the formation of civil organisations, and it also affects the scale of formal volunteering (Boje, 2017).

Given the increasingly dynamic nature of these activities, volunteering needs to be understood in a broader sense. According to Hustinx (2010), all forms of volunteering and engagement should be included in a broader definition of community engagement. Community engagement can be found in very different contexts, and each context must be carefully defined in light of the community concerned and its democratic traditions.

Active and meaningful community involvement occurs when individuals are constructively involved, not only because they have the legal right to do so, but also when they feel empowered by shared cultural values and beliefs in their community, and when these activities benefit their social networks and local communities.

### **The Perspective of Citizenship in the Framework of Civic Engagement**

Community involvement is crucial to creating a strong, independent, and sustainable country (Shaker, 2014). Community involvement includes citizens' active participation in public-interest activities, such as decision-making, development, and social services. This involvement is not limited to exercising rights and obligations, but also includes a proactive attitude, social awareness, and responsibility towards the environment and the surrounding community. As Norris (2002) argues, citizen engagement encompasses a variety of participatory practices by individuals and groups that shape social, political and cultural life, and strengthen the structures and norms that underpin communal interaction.

Adler and Goggin (2005) state that civic engagement describes how citizens actively participate in community life for the benefit of others or to help shape society. Citizen engagement in social life is the hope of realising society's ideals. Civic engagement is one of the main concepts in community civic life that enables participation in public life. Civic engagement is divided into two types: first, structural or formal; second, everyday or activist.

Both institutionalised and informal forms of engagement play a role in promoting cooperation, strengthening social bonds, and facilitating collective decision-making, and can further influence government policy and certain legal decisions. Dekker (2009) explains that citizen engagement is based on the concept of citizenship equality, which shapes how individuals and groups interact in the public sphere. Citizenship is the actions and activities carried out by citizens from all social groups. Through their participation in the collective decision-making process, they gain a sense of belonging to their community, shared social relationships, and shared values (Kurniati, 2021).

Citizenship is a quality embedded in institutions and organisations that stimulate, reproduce, and foster civility and reach out to citizens based on solidarity and inclusiveness. Citizenship is often mentioned when discussing virtue and good manners. People practise civility in their social relationships with others by showing tolerance, mutual respect, social concern, involvement, and responsibility. Therefore, civility primarily concerns forms of individual behaviour in social relationships. Citizenship is also a set of procedures and institutions that enable democratic participation and learning to work with others.

Eliasoph (1998) notes that citizenship defines the scope of participation, and politeness determines how to interact, while citizenship reflects the overall health of the culture of citizenship, characterised by trust, reciprocity, and commitment to the common good. The rights and obligations conferred by citizenship are the conditions that enable the practice of citizenship and civic engagement. Therefore, Fraser (2005) refers to the scope of participation in citizenship as 'equality of participation', which is linked to redistribution, recognition, and representation, all of which are crucial for social cohesion and egalitarian living conditions.

In her analysis of participatory democracy, Fraser argues that the prerequisite for justice, in general and in political decision-making in particular, is 'equality of participation'. She emphasises that social justice requires 'social arrangements that enable everyone to participate as equals in social life. Overcoming injustice means dismantling the institutional barriers that prevent some people from participating equally with others as full partners in social interaction' (Fraser, 2005).

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Equal participation is only possible when all individuals have the opportunity to be fully and equally involved in all institutions of society. Society must be free from structural constraints that hinder its involvement. All citizens must have equal access to institutions, opportunities to engage in civic activities and decision-making, and the ability to shape their living conditions both formally and through activism. Access must extend not only to the social and economic spheres, but also to the political and civil spheres, as both guarantee equal participation in decision-making on issues that affect citizens' lives. All aspects of community life, recognition of diversity of identity and culture, fair redistribution of economic resources, and representation in political/civic institutions are very important in supporting citizen engagement and social cohesion, known as participatory democracy (Fraser, 2005).

### **The Dynamics of Citizenship and the Direction of Statehood**

This appears to be dialectical, juxtaposing the reality of the state with the ideals of statehood, like a contradiction between *das sollen* and *das sein*. However, this balance is intended to find a synthesis as a new and alternative orientation in mediating reality. As Russell argues, ideas resulting from thought must be realistic. Similarly, in achieving the direction of statehood, one cannot ignore reality.

Most social science literature defines citizenship as the economic, social, and political rights and obligations granted to every citizen as a member of society. Citizenship serves as the basic framework for civic engagement, defining the rights and responsibilities of individuals in a particular socio-political system (Marshall & Bottomore, 1950/1992).

In other words, citizenship grants certain rights to a person in return for compliance with certain democratic requirements and demands from public institutions. In a legalistic sense, citizenship is a legal status and formal membership of a nation-state. Citizenship gives a person an identity and social status that determines how they are recognised as a member of society, including by public, private and civil institutions (Lynggaard & Boje, 2025).

All individuals living in a nation-state have rights, such as the right to protection and recognition as human beings (Isin, 2009). Normatively, citizens have the right to participate in the community's social life. They are treated equally in terms of economic, political, and civil rights. This includes the right to express opinions, demands, and even objections to state policies or decisions that are deemed to be unfair.

Therefore, citizenship is not static. It is a dynamic process negotiated through participatory practices that redefine the boundaries of social inclusion and exclusion. Society needs to be aware that all types of rights can be lost at any time. This includes political rights such as the right to vote, freedom of assembly, and freedom of speech, as well as social rights such as access to citizenship, social protection, education, and so on, due to inconsistencies in the rules that are suspected to be driven by political and power ambitions. Therefore, the ethics of citizenship must be upheld through democratic, dignified daily practices.

Referring to the legal proceedings in the lengthy case of Tom Lembong, the president ultimately granted abolition as a special right of the president. This is not necessarily seen as a convicted corruptor being granted abolition or pardon and the erasure of the legal case against him, in the sense that the legal case is considered never to have existed. However, there are reasons behind this, including the mass movement that did not accept the charges against Tom Lembong, especially since the public considered the case politically motivated or a politicisation of the law, given that Tom Lembong is a political figure from the ruling party. Even though this legal case involved corruption, which is deeply despised by the public, this means that what the public

desires is not the enforcement of the law but a sense of justice, because the ideal of justice transcends the process of law enforcement.

Given the facts that have emerged about citizens' concerns regarding treatment and equality before the law, it should be noted that public institutions must serve everyone equally. Once again, the argument of 'equality of participation' is a fundamental requirement for citizen involvement and the capacity to engage in dialogue and decision-making on public issues. In fact, the opposite can also occur, with citizens forming structural movements and demanding involvement in a particular institution (Hustinx, 2010).

Citizenship means that every citizen is responsibly involved in public affairs, contributes to the common good, and fosters a culture of dialogue and cooperation between individuals, social groups, and institutions. In this case, citizenship emphasises the shared role of individuals and institutions in building *a civil society in which* democratic values and social cohesion are essential for social stability and citizen engagement. In this case, citizenship catalyses participation, motivating citizens to engage in public life, and also promotes civility, strengthening social bonds and fostering mutual social support between groups.

In maintaining the sustainability of citizen engagement, it is important to have a code of civility, which is a prerequisite for civic engagement and social networks because it regulates how citizens interact with each other and with institutions, facilitating cooperation regardless of ideological, cultural, or political differences.

As Evers (2009) defines civility as a form of learned behaviour that crosses public and private boundaries, allowing both spheres to coexist peacefully despite differences. He adds that the associated qualities are usually formulated in terms of individual virtue and manners, tolerance, self-control, mutual respect, commitment to others, social concern, engagement, and responsibility.

Therefore, the ethics of civility is very important in democracy, serving as a normative framework that allows pluralism to coexist with social cohesion, thereby strengthening the legitimacy and functionality of civil institutions. At the same time, ethical civility depends on how citizens practise their active citizenship through involvement in associations, social networks, or local communities, as well as on the organisational structures in the country where these activities take place.

### **Citizenship Oriented towards *Civil Society***

Drawing on studies of citizenship from a scientific perspective, Somantri (1976) states that citizenship as a science (civics) is an element of political science, or a branch of political science, concerned with the rights and obligations of citizens. Ahmad Sanusi (1972), an expert in social studies, states that insofar as civics can be viewed as a discipline within political science, its focus is on the position and role of citizens in exercising their rights and obligations in accordance with and within the limits of the relevant country's constitution.

In this case, citizenship can be understood as an entity that exists in a democratic space, where democratic values themselves are implemented through the concept of citizenship. Thus, citizenship can be conceptualised as granting certain rights to individuals in return for their compliance with democratic rules and acceptance of society's institutional order, thereby providing all citizens with access to official and political institutions so they can influence them.

Citizenship can provide an institutional and legal basis for engagement without neglecting the ethics of courtesy among fellow citizens, thereby avoiding the risk of confrontational, counterproductive engagement. Conversely, ensuring constructive

engagement requires broader cultural and institutional support for citizenship to be sustainable over time (Lynggaard & Boje, 2025).

By emphasising the combined roles of individuals and institutions through the concept of citizen engagement, citizenship contributes to social, economic, political, and civil institutions that uphold the values of democracy, mutual dialogue, and social cohesion. Therefore, citizenship is a prerequisite for civility or civil society.

Theoretically, the relationship between citizenship and civic engagement can be conceptualised as follows: *First*, citizenship, as a political institution, functions as an 'interface' between organisations and individuals in their relationships with the state, government, and people (Janoski, 1998). *Second*, civil rights are instruments that enable citizens to participate in and influence civil activities (Cohen & Arato, 1992). *Third*, civil society as a network of associations functions as a school for the values and virtues that characterise ideal democratic citizens who uphold their rights (Tocqueville, 1988), which is illustrated as a consistent flow of realising civility or the ideal condition of a civil society community.

In social life, citizens must balance diversity and conformity. The right to participate in determining the fate of the people can be realised in various forms. However, the right to vote and be active in a democratic system that elects representatives to government institutions is fundamental. Nevertheless, the relationship between citizens and decision-making bodies can become increasingly strained. This is partly because decisions are made without transparency, creating public distrust of the state or government.

Another growing challenge to democratic participation is the transformation of the representative political system. With only a small proportion of the population actively involved in political parties, opportunities for substantive civic engagement are diminishing. The increasing tendency for parties to select candidates behind closed doors and in a top-down manner also weakens citizenship, as individuals have fewer opportunities to exercise their political rights (Boje, 2021).

Citizenship helps determine the scope of civic engagement, as the rights and recognition granted to individuals can enhance their ability to participate actively in the civic sphere. For example, if citizens feel unrecognised, disrespected, or excluded from a community group, their capacity to act as engaged citizens will be significantly reduced. Thus, ethical attitudes ensure that participation is guided by mutual respect, tolerance, and constructive dialogue, while citizenship provides the institutional and cultural conditions that support inclusive engagement. And then citizens' actions have greater power when they are within democratic institutions that uphold the principles of citizenship and ensure that engagement is not only active but also sympathetic, respectful and inclusive.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, citizen engagement within and outside civil society organisations has the potential to contribute to democratic citizen participation and ensure social integration and cohesion. Citizenship engagement is not always limited to the realm of citizenship; it can also be a feature of organisations in the public and private spheres. Moreover, citizen engagement is an effort to overcome the inevitable social differentiation that arises between social groups and to minimise the marginalisation that continues to occur in society.

As mentioned above, the prerequisites for civic engagement and being a good citizen are awareness of one's rights and obligations as a citizen, as well as the ability to actively participate in social and political life. This involvement includes an understanding of social and political issues, the ability to interact with government and public institutions, and concern for decision-making on issues of collective interest. In this

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case, the condition is that citizens are active, involved, and committed to directing the conversation and that they communicate openly about the consequences of certain decisions and policies.

Democracy means having an interest in creating the common good. Therefore, the ethics of civility help ensure that interactions occur with mutual respect, even in cases of disagreement, helping prevent conversations from escalating into conflict and allowing meaningful exchanges of ideas and potential compromises that are more beneficial to a community or social network. Simply put, politeness means that listening is just as important as speaking (Barber, 1999).

Democratic conversation not only demands civility but also produces it, meaning that civility leads to the tolerance that helps citizens overcome the political disagreements that are always part of democratic dialogue (Barber, 1999). For citizen engagement to be sustainable, it must be based on the ethics of civility. Strong social relationships, a clear understanding of citizens' roles in various contexts, and empathy increase the likelihood of building lasting networks and contributing meaningfully to the community in an inclusive manner. The ethics of civility are crucial in democratic dynamics, mutual respect, and respect for citizens' rights. However, the negation of the ethics of civility, and particularly the denial of citizens' rights, in most public discourse can distort participation, increase polarisation, and erode trust in state institutions. For example, although protests and activism on social media are important forms of civic expression, they can also trigger abuse, misinformation, or exclusionary mobilisation.

Thus, while civic engagement is essential for democratic resilience and social cohesion, it must be guided by ethical norms and reinforced by citizenship to ensure that it contributes constructively to society rather than exacerbating exclusion or division. As Alexander (2006) asserts, disrupting opportunities to practise citizenship and its prerequisites is tantamount to disregarding the idea of living in a democratic society. Thus, the priority should be to focus on how democratic societies address potential economic, social, and civic opportunities and obstacles that impact citizens' daily lives (Dekker, 2009). In conclusion, it is important to emphasise that citizenship offers a concept for analysing the normative and ethical dimensions of citizen engagement. This concept can be used to examine how values, discourse, and behavioural norms shape the inclusiveness of citizen engagement, thereby enabling the state's orientation in a democratic space to be realised in a way that ideally fosters the creation of a civil society.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest in relation to this study.

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