

Public Space as Resistance: Kaltim Kamisan and Indonesia's Democratic Restrictions

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Abstract. This study is motivated by the narrowing of civic space in Indonesia, where constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression increasingly encounter administrative, spatial, and political restrictions in practice. This study aims to analyze how public space is utilized as a form of civil society resistance through Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan in responding to democratic restrictions. Using a qualitative descriptive case study approach, the research was conducted in Samarinda, East Kalimantan, through direct observation, documentation, and semi-structured in-depth interviews with five purposively selected informants consisting of movement organizers, participants, and an academic observer. Data were analyzed using interactive and thematic analysis grounded in Gramsci's theory of hegemony and counter-hegemony. The findings show that Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan utilizes Tepian Mahakam and the East Kalimantan Governor's Office as strategic arenas for articulating human rights, environmental, indigenous, and social justice issues through peaceful symbolic actions. The movement faces administrative control, intimidation, limitations on public expression, digital attacks, and disruption of protest infrastructure, yet it transforms public space into a site of political education, collective memory, and participatory democratic engagement. This study concludes that public space functions as a contested arena where civil society negotiates, resists, and reclaims democratic participation amid local restrictions. The novelty of this study lies in positioning public space as a localized counter-hegemonic arena shaped by socio-environmental conflicts and democratic constraints in East Kalimantan. The study contributes theoretically to debates on democracy, public space, and social movements, while practically emphasizing the importance of inclusive public spaces in strengthening participatory democracy.

Keywords: *Public Space; Civil Resistance; Aksi Kamisan Kaltim; Democracy Restrictions; Democracy Backsliding; Participatory Democracy*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the quality of democracy in Indonesia has shown a tendency toward stagnation and even decline, particularly in the areas of civil liberties and public participation as fundamental pillars of a democratic system (Hapsoro & Rofiqi, 2024). Although freedom of expression is normatively guaranteed by the constitution under Article 28E paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution and reinforced by Law No. 9 of 1998 concerning Freedom of Expression in Public (Nasution, 2020), empirical realities indicate a growing gap between legal provisions and their implementation. In this context, freedom should not only be understood as a formal right but also as the substantive capacity of citizens to express their aspirations without coercion or restriction (Aoudia, 2024). However, regulatory frameworks governing public space often function as instruments that limit such freedoms, revealing a paradox between legal guarantees and actual practices (Fatimah et al., 2024).

Previous studies have shown that democratic decline does not only affect institutional aspects but also directly impacts civil liberties, including press freedom, government accountability, and increased risks of corruption, nepotism, and social instability (Yulianta, 2025). In democratic systems, freedom of expression and access to public space serve as essential foundations for citizen participation, public opinion formation, and mechanisms of power control, although in practice they are frequently constrained (Junaidi & Rodiah, 2023). Empirical data further support this condition, as Indonesia's press freedom score declined significantly from 63.23 in 2019 to 51.15 in 2024 according to Reporters Without Borders (Green Network, 2024). This trend indicates a systematic narrowing of democratic space, both structurally and culturally.

The central problem in this context lies in the increasing restriction of public space as a medium for civil society expression, which should ideally function as an open arena for the exchange of ideas, criticism, and aspirations (Kassa & Sarikakis, 2022). Over the past decade, Indonesia has remained stagnant within the category of limited democracy, achieving its highest score of 7.03 in 2015, followed by a persistent downward trend despite slight improvements in 2019 and 2021. Regionally, Indonesia ranks fourth after Malaysia, Timor Leste, and the Philippines (GoodStats, 2025), reflecting unresolved structural challenges in democratic consolidation. This condition highlights that the crisis of democracy is not merely normative but deeply embedded in socio-political practices that restrict civil society engagement (Cornell et al., 2026).

International reports further confirm this decline. According to The Economist Intelligence Unit (2024), Indonesia scored 6.44 in the Democracy Index and is classified as a flawed democracy, ranking 59th out of 167 countries. This decline continues a negative trend since 2022, particularly in the areas of government functioning, electoral processes, and pluralism (Tempo, 2025). Existing literature generally proposes solutions centered on institutional strengthening, governance reform, and improved transparency and accountability. However, these approaches tend to be top-down and often fail to adequately address grassroots dynamics, particularly the role of public space as a site of everyday democratic practice and resistance (Thakkar, 2025; Mason, 2020).

Within these limitations, public space emerges as a strategic arena that serves not only as a site of social interaction but also as a political space where civil society can articulate demands and resist dominant power structures (Jacobsson & Korolczuk, 2020). A prominent example of such practice is Aksi Kamisan, a moral movement that consistently advocates for justice and rejects impunity in cases of human rights violations. This movement emphasizes the importance of maintaining public space free from repression while demonstrating how symbolic and peaceful actions can function as tools of resistance and collective awareness-building (Shokheh, 2023).

However, despite their conceptual strength, spatial and counter-hegemonic approaches remain largely theoretical and are often applied in contexts of global cities or national capitals in Western or centralized political systems. Critical dimensions such as regional governance structures, localized regulatory regimes, and variations in state–civil society relations remain underexplored. As a result, existing frameworks require contextual adaptation and empirical validation in peripheral regions where political, ecological, and economic conditions significantly shape the dynamics of public space. This gap is particularly relevant in resource-rich regions such as East Kalimantan, where socio-environmental conflicts intersect with political expression.

In response to democratic restrictions, various civil society movements have emerged as forms of resistance, including Aksi Kamisan, a symbolic protest movement initiated by the Indonesian Solidarity Network for Justice Victims (JSKK) and Maria Katarina Sumarsih on January 18, 2007, and widely recognized through its use of black umbrellas as a silent protest against unresolved human rights violations (Zahana et al., 2024; Yudistira & Husodo, 2022). Inspired by Argentina’s “Plaza de Mayo” movement, Aksi Kamisan has evolved into an inclusive movement known internationally as the Black Umbrella Protest (Adiwilaga, 2018; Andini et al., 2024). However, studies on the use of public space as localized resistance remain limited, particularly in East Kalimantan, where Aksi Kamisan not only addresses national human rights issues but also local structural problems such as mining conflicts, indigenous marginalization, land grabbing, and forest destruction. This demonstrates that regional socio-political and ecological contexts shape distinct forms of resistance, revealing a significant gap in understanding localized dynamics of public space and civil society movements.

Addressing this gap, this study offers novelty by positioning public space as a contested political arena that is not merely symbolic but also strategically important in constructing counter-hegemonic discourse against state domination (Toukan, 2020). Focusing on Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan, this study argues that public space functions as a site where civil society resistance emerges in response to structural limitations of democratic participation and socio-environmental injustice. Grounded in theories of spatial politics and counter-hegemony (Jacobsson & Korolczuk, 2020; Toukan, 2020), this research examines the dynamics of public space utilization, forms of resistance, and interactions between civil society and the state within local regulatory, socio-political, and resource-based conflict contexts. This perspective contributes to a broader understanding of democracy not only as an institutional framework but also as a lived social practice embedded in everyday life (Felicetti, 2021).

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how public space is utilized as a form of civil society resistance through the case of Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan in responding to democratic restrictions. Specifically, this research seeks to answer the following questions: (1) how is public

space utilized as a medium of resistance; (2) what forms of restrictions are encountered by the movement; and (3) how does Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan contribute to strengthening participatory democracy at the local level. The findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically to the discourse on democracy and social movements, and practically to the development of inclusive and democratic public spaces.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on public space in democratic contexts show an ongoing debate between viewing it as an open arena for civic participation and as a regulated space shaped by power relations that may limit freedom of expression. Social movement literature highlights that such restrictions often trigger various forms of resistance, including symbolic protest. However, in Indonesia, research still largely focuses on national-level movements and institutional democracy indicators, with limited attention to regional variation. This is also reflected in the movement of Aksi Kamisan Kaltim, which utilizes public space not only as a site of action but also as a medium of resistance against democratic restrictions and an effort to expand political participation and public political awareness.

Theories and Concepts

Utilization and Freedom of Public Space

Article 28 of the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia, along with Article 28E paragraph (3), formally guarantees citizens' rights to associate, assemble, and express opinions. These constitutional provisions are further reinforced by Law No. 39 of 1999 concerning Human Rights and Law No. 9 of 1998 on Freedom of Expression in Public, which collectively position freedom of expression as a fundamental democratic right within Indonesia's legal framework (Kompas, 2022). However, critical scholarship argues that these normative guarantees do not always translate into practice, as their implementation is shaped by political, institutional, and regulatory power relations that determine the extent to which public expression is enabled or constrained (Nofia Sari et al., 2026). Therefore, legal frameworks alone are insufficient to fully explain how freedom of expression is practiced, restricted, or negotiated in everyday democratic life.

In broader academic debates, this condition reflects the tension between normative liberal democratic approaches and critical perspectives that emphasize power relations within the public sphere. Jürgen Habermas' concept of the public sphere views it as an ideal space for rational-critical discourse that is open, inclusive, and free from domination (Habermas, 2022; Ayunda et al., 2022). However, empirical studies challenge this ideal by showing that public space is often shaped by state regulation, social hierarchy, and institutional control that affect access, visibility, and participation. In the Indonesian context, this is evident in spaces such as Teras Samarinda and

the area surrounding the East Kalimantan Governor's Office, which function not only as administrative sites but also as arenas of contestation between civic expression and state regulation. Therefore, these spaces are better understood as "contested public spheres," where democratic openness is continuously negotiated through mechanisms of control and spatial governance.

Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony Theory

The concept of hegemony proposed by Antonio Gramsci (1971) has been widely used in studies of civil society and social movements to explain how domination is sustained not only through coercion, but also through the production of consent via ideological, cultural, and institutional mechanisms that shape how reality is understood and accepted within society (Shorfana, 2025). In contemporary scholarship, there is an ongoing debate between approaches that view hegemony primarily as a top-down mechanism of state control and those that understand it as a more dispersed process embedded in everyday social relations. Coercive approaches emphasize the role of law enforcement and regulatory institutions in maintaining order, while critical perspectives argue that domination becomes more effective when it is internalized as "common sense" within society. In response, counter-hegemony is understood as the capacity of subordinate groups to disrupt dominant narratives through alternative meanings, practices, and collective actions (Suhardi, 2024; Kristiyono, 2020). This tension between domination and resistance provides an important analytical foundation for understanding civic movements in contested democratic contexts.

Within the context of Aksi Kamisan Kaltim, this framework of hegemony and counter-hegemony is clearly reflected in its social practice. In addition to experiencing restrictions on expressive space through regulations, surveillance, and administrative pressures, Aksi Kamisan Kaltim also functions as an arena of articulation for marginalized groups within local democratic dynamics. The movement voices issues of human rights violations, particularly those affecting Indigenous communities in Kalimantan who are often marginalized in development projects, as well as the repression of activists who critically oppose state policies. Furthermore, Aksi Kamisan Kaltim highlights environmental destruction caused by extractive activities that threaten community livelihoods, along with the silencing of critical voices that demonstrates the shrinking of democratic space under the dominance of state power (Suhardi, 2024; Kristiyono, 2020). In this sense, Aksi Kamisan Kaltim is not only an object of hegemonic mechanisms but also a counter-hegemonic actor that actively produces alternative narratives against structural injustice, while transforming public space into an arena of discursive struggle between the state and civil society (Moyo, 2024; Ruuska et al., 2020; Seeck et al., 2020).

Restrictions on Democracy

Restrictions on democracy should be understood through a multi-layered analytical framework that integrates democratic backsliding, legal restriction, administrative control, and direct repression, rather than treating them as isolated phenomena. Within the comparative literature on democracy, there is an ongoing debate between scholars who conceptualize democratic decline as primarily institutional erosion at the macro level, and those who emphasize everyday governance practices that gradually narrow civic space. Democratic backsliding is generally understood as a structural process marked by the concentration of political power and the weakening of democratic institutions (Wibowo et al., 2024; Hossain et al., 2024). However, more recent studies argue that such structural decline becomes operational through micro-level mechanisms, particularly legal and bureaucratic instruments that regulate civic participation. In this sense, legal restrictions function through formal provisions governing freedom of expression and assembly, while administrative control operates through procedural mechanisms that determine the conditions under which public demonstrations are permitted or managed (Ombudsman, 2019). At a more direct level, repression refers to coercive state actions such as dispersal, suppression, or restriction of assemblies, often justified through public order rationales and implemented through legal instruments such as Perkap No. 7 of 2012 (Neraca, 2024). When compared, these studies collectively show that restrictions on democracy are not singular acts of repression, but layered governance mechanisms that jointly structure the boundaries of civic participation (Pinckney et al., 2022).

Building on this debate, civil society scholarship highlights a contrasting perspective that views these restrictions not only as constraints, but also as conditions that generate new forms of collective resistance. In this regard, movements such as Aksi Kamisan Kaltim are interpreted as responses to the narrowing of civic space, where public space is reclaimed as an arena of political expression and contestation. While earlier studies emphasize civil society as an agent of democratization, more critical perspectives argue that its capacity for transformation is often conditioned by legal frameworks, political structures, and organizational resources, which limit its effectiveness in challenging entrenched power relations (Erisanna & Afsani, 2025). In the Indonesian context, this tension becomes more evident as constitutional guarantees of human rights coexist with structural inequalities and oligarchic influence over political and economic resources (Khusniah, 2024; Wibowo et al., 2024). Moreover, recent studies show that the management of public demonstrations through intelligence-based policing reflects how administrative control and direct repression operate in practice, not only to maintain order but also to regulate visibility, movement, and legitimacy of civic action within public space (Ombudsman, 2019; Neraca, 2024). Thus, restrictions on democracy should be understood as

dynamic and relational processes that simultaneously constrain and shape the forms of civil society resistance.

Civil Participation

New social movement theory, civil society studies, and democratic governance literature present different yet interconnected perspectives on how collective action emerges within contemporary democracies. Scholars of new social movements emphasize decentralized, flexible, and non-bureaucratic organizational forms that prioritize issue-based struggles rather than rigid institutional structures (Nofrima & Qodir, 2021). From this view, collective action is understood as fluid and adaptive, shaped by shifting political opportunities and social grievances. In contrast, civil society literature highlights the role of non-state actors in strengthening democracy through advocacy, political education, empowerment, and democratic oversight functions (Rusfiana & Kurniasih, 2024). While both perspectives acknowledge civic engagement, they differ in focus: new social movement theory concentrates on organizational dynamics and mobilization patterns, whereas civil society approaches emphasize functional contributions to democratic governance and institutional accountability.

However, other scholars argue that civil society should not only be seen as a supportive democratic actor, but also as a structural intermediary between citizens and the state that actively shapes accountability, participation, and democratic values (Erisanna & Afsani, 2025). Beyond formal institutional engagement, participation also occurs in non-institutional arenas such as street protests, digital activism, cultural resistance, and everyday political practices that shape public awareness. Despite this, a key gap in the literature remains in explaining how these forms of participation operate simultaneously in contexts where public space is unevenly regulated and politically contested, particularly at the local level. Addressing this gap, this study positions Aksi Kamisan Kaltim as an empirical case that integrates these perspectives by showing how civil society participation is continuously produced through symbolic and spatial practices in public space. The movement reflects a hybrid form of engagement involving students, young activists, and academic actors, demonstrating that civic participation is not only institutional and organizational, but also spatially grounded and continuously negotiated within contested urban democratic spaces.

Aksi Kamisan Kaltim

Aksi Kamisan originated in 2007 during the administration of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono as a sustained symbolic protest by civil society demanding state accountability for unresolved gross human rights violations in Indonesia (Rini, 2022). The movement was initiated by families of victims such as Maria Katarina Sumarsih, Suciwati Munir, and Bedjo Untung, who

represent resistance against state violence, particularly in cases such as the 1965 Tragedy, Semanggi, Trisakti, Talangsari, and the enforced disappearances of 1997–1998 (Putra, 2016). In its original form in Jakarta, Aksi Kamisan developed as a moral and symbolic action held in front of the State Palace, emphasizing silence, consistency, and collective memory as its main strategy of resistance against impunity.

The expansion of Aksi Kamisan to various regions, including East Kalimantan, reflects the adaptation of this movement beyond the national capital. Aksi Kamisan Kaltim was first held on 2 August 2017 in front of the East Kalimantan Governor's Office, initiated by Kahar Al Bahri (also known as Bang Ocha) as one of its key figures (Klik Kaltim, 2019). While maintaining the symbolic framework of the Jakarta movement, Kamisan in East Kalimantan demonstrates a different empirical orientation by expanding its issues beyond national human rights violations to include local structural injustices such as mining conflicts, discrimination against indigenous communities, land grabbing, and environmental destruction caused by extractive industries (Hendrawan et al., 2022; Wulandari, 2023). This indicates a contextual shift in which the movement functions not only as a space of national memory politics but also as a platform for articulating region-specific socio-ecological injustices shaped by local political economy dynamics.

Compared to Kamisan in Jakarta, which primarily focuses on unresolved historical human rights violations at the national level, Aksi Kamisan Kaltim represents a more hybrid form of resistance that combines national human rights discourse with local socio-ecological struggles such as agrarian conflict, indigenous marginalization, and extractive industry impacts. This difference is not only empirical but also theoretical, as it demonstrates how collective memory politics and resistance practices are reconfigured within resource-dependent regions characterized by environmental exploitation and unequal access to land and resources. Although participation remains relatively small, the movement functions as a form of moral politics that consistently pressures the state while sustaining public awareness of injustice and impunity (Putra, 2016). The absence of effective legal mechanisms, such as ad hoc human rights courts, further strengthens Kamisan's role as a symbolic space of resistance and collective memory, where silent protest becomes an ongoing critique of state accountability (Ali & Rauf, 2021; Elizabeth F Drexler, 2022).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive case study approach to examine public space as a site of civil society resistance through Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan under democratic restrictions. Grounded in Gramsci's theory of hegemony and counter-hegemony, the research

analyzes how resistance emerges through symbolic actions, public space utilization, and critical discourse. The study was conducted in Samarinda, East Kalimantan, particularly at Tepian Mahakam and the East Kalimantan Governor's Office, from September 2025 to March 2026. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement, experience, and relevance to the research focus. Data were collected from five purposively selected informants consisting of two Aksi Kamisan organizers/actors, two action participants, and one academic who also serves as a political observer, through semi-structured interviews and direct observation. Secondary data were obtained from academic literature, official reports, media sources, and movement documents. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and supported by field notes and documentation. Data were analyzed using interactive and thematic analysis based on Gramscian theory, while validity was ensured through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing.

RESULT

The researcher conducted fieldwork to collect data through observation and interviews with research informants in order to obtain information regarding the utilization of public space as a form of resistance in the context of Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan against restrictions on democracy. The data collected include the experiences, perspectives, and practices of relevant actors in utilizing public space as a medium of expression and resistance toward various forms of democratic restrictions.

Utilization and Freedom of Public Space

Field observations and interviews show that Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan consistently utilizes public spaces such as Tepian Mahakam and the East Kalimantan Governor's Office to voice criticism, convey public demands, and raise awareness regarding various social and political issues. The utilization of public space by Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan demonstrates that such spaces are not merely sites of ordinary social activity, but also function as arenas for articulating public criticism and demands toward the state (Jungherr & Schroeder, 2021). Public space is understood as an open medium through which society collectively voices issues related to human rights violations, injustice, and restrictions on democracy (Fernandez & Christopher, 2020). The regular presence of this movement in strategic locations indicates that public space can be reclaimed and reinterpreted as a living political space, where citizens are not merely spectators but active subjects engaged in the democratic process (Iversen, 2025).

From a Gramscian perspective, public space is not neutral but is shaped by relations of power through the operation of hegemony, which normalizes domination by embedding certain values, norms, and ways of thinking into everyday social life so that they are accepted as common

sense (Kaleem, 2022). However, public space also provides room for counter-hegemony, where civil society constructs alternative discourses and challenges dominant power structures (Gisinger, 2023). This resistance is expressed through collective actions, public demonstrations, and symbolic practices that aim to raise critical awareness and question inequalities within the existing order (Luque, 2021).

The freedom to utilize public space is closely tied to the dynamic relationship between society and the state. Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan emerges as a form of collective resistance that affirms citizens' rights to assemble, express opinions, and convey aspirations peacefully. Although in practice it often faces various constraints, both structural and cultural, the consistency of this movement reflects an ongoing effort to preserve democratic space. Thus, public space is not only a physical location but also a symbol of the struggle for civil liberties that continues to be negotiated by society. The following image shows the location where Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan carries out its acts of resistance.

In front of the East Kalimantan Provincial Governor's Office



Public Space: Samarinda City Terrace



Figure 1. Public Space Locations of Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan

Source: Aksi Kamisan Kaltim Official Instagram Documentation, 2026

Figure 1 presents the main public spaces utilized by Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan in conducting acts of civil resistance and expressing public demands. The East Kalimantan Provincial Governor's Office represents a strategic political space where the movement directly addresses state authority, while Samarinda City Terrace (Tepian Mahakam) functions as an open civic space that facilitates public interaction, visibility, and democratic participation. These locations demonstrate how public space is transformed into a contested arena for articulating criticism, human rights issues, environmental concerns, and democratic aspirations.

Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan consistently utilizes the public space of Teras Samarinda as the location for its activities, as a form of asserting the public's right to use shared spaces for collective interests. Ocha (2025), the founder of Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan, stated that: "Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan was burdened with having to submit a notification letter to the police for every action, but we chose not to comply and preferred to be dispersed rather than having to file a report each time. This is because the basic principle of Kamisan is non-violence and resistance; we carry out actions without violence. Eventually, up to this day, the police have stopped requiring notification letters for Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan."

Similarly, a grassroots activist of Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan, Opin (2026), also shared his experience regarding criticism and forms of intervention encountered in the use of public space during the implementation of the movement, as well as the importance of public space for Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan: "For eight years since Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan was established, there have been many instances of restrictions on public space, particularly in expressing opinions, delivering expressions, and voicing strong criticism toward the government. For example, friends who carried out actions in front of the governor's office were often intervened in and even prohibited from demonstrating. In principle, public facilities belong to the people and should be used for public interests, not exclusively for officials. This is our right as citizens to express criticism and carry out actions as a form of our concern and love for the nation. Our response is clear: we have never submitted, and we have never stepped back."

Participants of the movement also play an active role in expressing their views and contributing to the discourse on the utilization of public space as an arena for articulating aspirations. Likewise, Ikhsan (2026), a student of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at Mulawarman University who actively participates in Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan, stated that: "The utilization and freedom of public space are crucial for society in expressing criticism; it would be highly detrimental if public space were restricted. Everyone has the right to access and use public space, as the rights to association and assembly are guaranteed."

Similarly, Bachtiar (2026), the President of the Student Executive Board (BEM) of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at Untag 1945 Samarinda, who actively participates in Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan, expressed his views regarding government regulations that are perceived to threaten democracy and the sustainability of public space as an arena for democratic expression, particularly for social movements such as Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan: "In my view, we must consolidate with all elements of society to demand and revoke such regulations, as they offer no benefit to us as citizens especially when our rights have not been fulfilled and the government introduces policies that threaten us. It is time for us to express our anger, and I hope

the government listens to marginalized voices so that we, as ordinary citizens, can still place some trust in policymakers that our voices are truly represented by those we have elected.”

Saipul (2026), a political observer and academic at Mulawarman University, emphasized that the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and criticism are fundamentally guaranteed under the 1945 Constitution. However, there remains a gap between these normative guarantees and their implementation in practice, particularly regarding the limited availability of public space as a channel for public aspirations: “Democratic freedoms such as expression, assembly, and the right to convey criticism or suggestions regarding policies are constitutionally guaranteed in Indonesia as part of fundamental human rights, equality before the law, and popular sovereignty. However, in practice, a gap persists between these formal guarantees and their implementation, as the state has not sufficiently provided inclusive and accessible public spaces for citizens to express their aspirations. Historically, public spaces such as those in Ancient Greece and deliberative traditions in Islamic civilization functioned as open arenas for dialogue and criticism without intervention. Therefore, the provision of inclusive and unrestricted public spaces remains crucial for strengthening substantive democracy, ensuring that public participation is not limited to formal mechanisms but can also occur openly, freely, and sustainably.”

Restrictions on Democracy

Aksi Kamisan Kaltim emphasizes that the Constitution, particularly Articles 28 and 28E of the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia, guarantees citizens’ rights to assemble, express opinions, and exercise freedom of expression (Sofwan et al., 2022). These provisions serve as both a moral and legal foundation for the public to safeguard democratic values and convey criticism of state policies openly and peacefully (Koliba, 2025). However, there are also regulations that have the potential to restrict and hinder democracy and freedom of expression. The following table presents various regulations that may limit public freedom and freedom of expression in Indonesia.

Table 1 presents selected national regulations relevant to the restriction of freedom of expression, public assembly, and civic participation in Indonesia. The regulations were selected based on their direct relevance to issues frequently encountered by Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan, particularly in relation to protest activities, public criticism, administrative control, and the management of public space. The table distinguishes between the legal provisions, their common interpretation in practice, and their empirical relevance to the experiences of Aksi Kamisan Kaltim.

Table 1. Regulations Restricting Freedom of Expression in Indonesia

Regulation	Article	Legal Provision	Potential Issues
ITE Law (Law No. 11/2008 as amended by Law No. 19/2016)	Article 27(3)	Prohibits the distribution of electronic information containing defamation or insults	Potentially used to criminalize online criticism toward public officials
ITE Law (Law No. 11/2008 as amended by Law No. 19/2016)	Article 28(2)	Prohibits the dissemination of information inciting hatred based on ethnicity, religion, race, or intergroup relations (SARA)	Often interpreted broadly and may suppress freedom of expression
Criminal Code (New KUHP, 2022)	Article 240	Regulates insults against the government or state institutions	Considered to limit criticism toward authorities and public institutions
Criminal Code (New KUHP, 2022)	Article 256	Demonstrations without prior notification that disrupt public order may be subject to sanctions	Potentially limits freedom of assembly and public protest
Law No. 9/1998 on Freedom of Expression in Public	Article 10 (3)	Written notification of demonstrations must be submitted 3×24 hours before the event	Administrative requirements may be used to restrict demonstrations
Law No. 9/1998 on Freedom of Expression in Public	Article 15	Demonstrations may be dispersed if considered inconsistent with legal provisions	The phrase “not in accordance with provisions” is vague and open to interpretation

Source: Author’s own elaboration, 2026

The interpretation and empirical relevance of these regulations to Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan can be seen in the way several legal provisions are broadly interpreted and potentially used to restrict freedom of expression, public criticism, and protest activities. Regulations related to defamation, insults against authorities, hate speech, and protest notification requirements are often perceived by activists as mechanisms that enable administrative control, limitations on demonstrations, and the narrowing of democratic space. Empirically, Aksi Kamisan Kaltim has experienced pressures related to protest notification demands, potential dispersal of actions, restrictions on the use of public space, and concerns over criminalization of critical expression, both in physical and digital spaces. These conditions indicate that legal regulations not only function as instruments of order but may also operate as mechanisms that shape and limit civic participation and collective resistance in public space.

In a democratic system, the state does not possess legitimate grounds to impose excessive restrictions on democratic freedoms, given that the fundamental principle of democracy affirms that sovereignty resides with the people (Khan, 2021). Within this framework, citizens are

positioned as the primary actors in political life who hold constitutional rights to participate, express opinions, assemble peacefully, and critically evaluate government policies without disproportionate state interference (Nissen, 2021). Therefore, freedom of expression constitutes an essential element that must be guaranteed by the state as part of the substantive implementation of popular sovereignty in democratic practice (Masferrer, 2023).

When the state enforces excessive limitations on democratic space, it risks shifting the essence of democracy from participatory principles toward a more restrictive framework. Regulations should function as instruments for protecting citizens' rights rather than constraining public participation (Aringga & Meuraksa, 2025). Accordingly, a balanced approach is required between maintaining public order and safeguarding civil liberties, ensuring that democratic practice remains inclusive, healthy, and consistent with the principle that ultimate political authority, both normatively and substantively, remains in the hands of the people (Mohammed et al., 2026). The forms of restrictions experienced by Aksi Kamisan Kaltim, based on interview findings, are presented in the following table.

Table 2. Restrictions on Democracy Experienced by Aksi Kamisan Kaltim

No.	Forms of Restrictions	Forms of Resistance
1.	Several parties expressed disapproval of the themes raised by Aksi Kamisan Kaltim, such as the issue of "Corruption in Regional-Owned Enterprise Funds," and demanded that the action be disbanded.	The coordinator of Aksi Kamisan Kaltim engaged in a debate with parties attempting to disband the action at the protest site.
2.	They were burdened by the requirement to submit a notification letter for the protest permit to the police.	Aksi Kamisan Kaltim chose not to respond to the request and did not issue any formal letter. They preferred to be dispersed rather than comply with the requirement.
3.	Aksi Kamisan Kaltim also experienced pressure and repressive treatment when participating in larger-scale actions together with students, such as demonstrations held at the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) and the Governor's Office, among other locations.	They continued to carry out actions in solidarity with the larger coalition that had been formed, despite facing various forms of pressure.
4.	The management of the public space "Teras Samarinda" once prohibited the use of the area for the implementation of Aksi Kamisan Kaltim.	They remained steadfast despite the prohibition and chose to be dispersed.
5.	Aksi Kamisan Kaltim was once on the verge of being dispersed by members of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) during an ongoing activity.	The coordinator of Aksi Kamisan Kaltim argued that the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) did not have the authority to disperse the action, stating that such authority lies with the police.
6.	Aksi Kamisan Kaltim was once at risk of being dispersed when the Vice President was scheduled to visit Samarinda at around	The coordinator of Aksi Kamisan Kaltim engaged in a discussion and questioned the timing of the Vice President's arrival, as

	the action was scheduled to end at 6:00 p.m. Western Indonesia Time (WITA).
7. Several Instagram posts of Aksi Kamisan Kaltim were repeatedly targeted by online attacks from buzzers, as well as other coordinated negative engagements on their posts.	Aksi Kamisan Kaltim is committed not to respond to negative comments on Instagram, while instead challenging those parties to engage in direct, face-to-face discussions.
8. The electricity supply used for the sound system in the public space was turned off or allegedly sabotaged by certain parties, thereby disrupting the use of loudspeakers during the implementation of the action.	Aksi Kamisan Kaltim remained at the protest site and took the initiative to independently provide a sound system, financed through internal contributions collected within the movement.

Source: Based on interviews, 2025–2026

The findings show that Aksi Kamisan East Kalimantan experiences various forms of democratic restrictions, including regulatory restrictions, administrative barriers, direct intimidation, digital attacks, and infrastructure disruption. These restrictions appeared through demands for protest notification letters, prohibitions on using public spaces such as Teras Samarinda, attempts to disperse actions, pressure from certain groups and security actors, coordinated online attacks on Instagram posts, and disruption of electricity supporting protest sound systems. In response, Aksi Kamisan Kaltim consistently maintained collective resistance by continuing actions, negotiating with authorities, refusing excessive administrative demands, encouraging open discussion, and independently providing logistical support. These findings indicate that democratic restrictions operate through both formal and informal mechanisms, while also demonstrating the adaptive and counter-hegemonic resistance practices developed by the movement.

Aksi Kamisan Kaltim consistently raises action themes that represent various forms of democratic restrictions. The articulation of these themes not only functions as a means of expressing public aspirations but also as a form of social criticism toward policies and practices of power that are perceived to limit civil rights and public participation space. This simultaneously demonstrates the role of the movement as a form of social control that seeks to maintain accountability and openness within democratic life. Through the utilization of public space as an arena for action, Aksi Kamisan Kaltim affirms its position as part of a civil resistance movement that seeks to preserve the continuity of democratic space at the local level. One example of democratic restriction occurred in Aksi Kamisan Kaltim, namely the unilateral cancellation of a public screening event of the film Eksil.



Nobar Film Eksil di Samarinda Dibatalkan Sepihak, Aksi Kamisan Kaltim Sebut Pembungkaman Demokrasi

Reporter: Ari Rachiem | Editor: Hariyadi | Kamis 22-02-2024,09:00 WIB

Figure 2. News Related to the Cancellation of the Public Screening Event

Source: Nomor Satu Kaltim, 2024

According to the media outlet Nomor Satu Kaltim, the public screening of the film EKSIL in Samarinda, initiated by Aksi Kamisan Kaltim, was abruptly canceled one day before the event on Wednesday (21 February 2024). In its official statement, Kamisan Kaltim stated that the cancellation was carried out unilaterally by the cinema management even though a down payment had already been made. When requesting clarification, the cinema required a crowd permit from the police. Aksi Kamisan Kaltim considered this requirement unreasonable and viewed it as a form of suppression of freedom of expression. Kamisan Kaltim emphasized that the Constitution, through Articles 28 and 28E of the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia, guarantees citizens' rights to assemble, speak, and express themselves (Nomor Satu Kaltim, 2024).













Figure 3. Repressive Actions Experienced by Aksi Kamisan Kaltim and News on Joint Security Force Repression

Source: Aksi Kamisan Kaltim, 2025 and Kaltim Today, 2025

The forced eviction of Pasar Subuh in Samarinda reflects how urban policy implementation can shift into coercive practices that undermine democratic principles. What was initially framed as a city reorganization effort was carried out repressively by joint security forces, including Satpol PP, without adequate dialogue, triggering clashes with residents and students. Allegations of violence, such as beatings and forced removals, indicate a departure from a humanistic and rights based approach (Kaltim Today, 2025). In this incident, Bachtiar, President of BEM FISIP Untag 1945 Samarinda and an activist in Aksi Kamisan Kaltim, became one of the victims of

state repression, highlighting that civil society actors are not only engaged in advocacy but are also vulnerable to coercive actions in policy implementation. Criticism from the DPRD further underscores the lack of proportionality and accountability, indicating that coercive approaches remain more dominant than democratic participation. In this context, the action themes concerning restrictions on democracy voiced by Aksi Kamisan Kaltim will be presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Action Themes of Aksi Kamisan Kaltim Highlighting Restrictions on Democracy

No.	Date, Action Theme	Documentation of the Action	Action Information Flyer
1.	15 January 2026 - Move, Solidarity, Reclaim People's Sovereignty		
2.	08 January 2026 - The New Order Returns, Criticism of the Rulers Ends Behind Bars		
3.	20 November 2025 - The Criminal Procedure Code (KUHAP) as the Tool, State Apparatus as the Perpetrator		
4.	13 November 2025 - The Semanggi Tragedy and the Return of the New Order		
5.	30 October 2025 - The Youth, the Silenced		

6.	09 October 2025 - Stop Criminalization, Release Our Comrades		
7.	17 July 2025 - RCUHAP, Then Arrested		
8.	21 May 2025 - 27 Years of Reformasi, We Challenge the State		

Source: Aksi Kamisan Kaltim Official Instagram Documentation, 2025-2026

The table above classifies the themes of Aksi Kamisan Kaltim actions based on the types of issues raised in each action, determined through content analysis of action materials (flyers and field documentation). The thematic grouping is conducted using a thematic analysis approach, focusing on the dominant issues in each activity. The theme categories are not based on frequency of occurrence, but rather on the relevance of the issues to the focus of political and legal critique, such as legislation, state repression, human rights violations, and historical reflection.

Aksi Kamisan Kaltim frequently faces various forms of criticism related to the themes of its actions, both delivered directly and through social media. Ikhsan (2026), a student of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP), Universitas Mulawarman, stated that: “The issues raised in Aksi Kamisan Kaltim are crucial issues that align with the mandate of the law, where the state has an obligation to ensure democracy, education, and public welfare. In my personal view, Aksi Kamisan is a form of movement that consistently voices the aspirations of grassroots communities, particularly the lower and middle classes. This is reflected in the recurring and relevant themes of its actions, especially amid governance conditions that still leave various unresolved problems.”

Bachtiar (2026), President of the Student Executive Board (BEM) of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP), Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Samarinda, who is actively involved

in Aksi Kamisan Kaltim and also one of the victims of repressive actions by joint security forces during a solidarity action at Pasar Subuh, stated his response regarding the intimidation experienced by Aksi Kamisan Kaltim during joint actions with allied groups: “I strongly condemn the acts of intimidation and discrimination experienced by Aksi Kamisan Kaltim. Every individual has the right to express opinions and participate in democratic activities without fear of violence or intimidation. I support the struggle for freedom of expression and human rights.”

In democratic practice, Aksi Kamisan Kaltim frequently experiences intervention and intimidation in its activities, both during direct actions in public spaces and through digital media. Opin (2026), a member of the Kamisan Kaltim activist group, expressed criticism regarding the restrictions on democracy experienced by Aksi Kamisan Kaltim, as well as his personal experiences of intimidation during these incidents: “We have been prohibited from holding actions. In addition, we have also experienced intervention and intimidation, such as being contacted via messages and phone calls, or being invited to meetings for certain lobbying attempts, all of which we refused. Furthermore, we were once prohibited from holding actions in front of the Governor’s Office, so the activity was relocated to the area beside Lamin Etam. In several instances, interventions were also carried out by security forces such as the TNI, Polri, and SATPOL PP. Not only that, on social media we frequently face attacks, including attempts to take down (takedown) educational content and posts inviting the public to participate in actions. Even posters or flyers calling for participation are often used as a pretext to target us, even though the call to hold or join a protest is a constitutional right guaranteed to citizens.”

Saipul (2026), a political observer and academic at Universitas Mulawarman, argues that although freedom of opinion and expression is guaranteed under the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia, in practice there are still instances where certain actors restrict public space for expression. The existence of regulations such as the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (UU ITE), the Criminal Procedure Code (KUHAP), and the Criminal Code (KUHP) is also perceived as potentially limiting democratic space for conveying criticism, thereby indicating a gap between normative guarantees and empirical realities in state practice: “Ideally, the state should provide dedicated public spaces for expressing aspirations without restrictive controls, as repressive dispersal practices by authorities contradict democratic principles. Establishing mutually agreed spaces and strengthening public understanding of democracy are essential, especially since criticism is often misinterpreted as a threat rather than a form of policy evaluation. Limited expressive space can trigger conflict, highlighting the need to distinguish between legitimate criticism and personal attacks, while ensuring all policies align with the 1945 Constitution. Therefore, both the public and the government must work together to foster healthy and sustainable democratic participation.”

Civil Participation

Civil participation in a democratic system should not be positioned as an optional choice, but rather as a normative necessity to ensure the effective functioning of public control over power (Eckerd & Heidelberg, 2020). The tendency toward public apathy can weaken mechanisms of checks and balances, thereby creating space for unaccountable governance. In this context, the persistence of various issues at the local, national, and global levels ranging from social inequality and human rights violations to environmental crises demonstrates that the role of civil society remains indispensable (Ferraz & Finan, 2025; Rusfiana & Kurniasih, 2024). Therefore, active citizen engagement in articulating criticism and aspirations constitutes an integral effort to ensure that public policies remain aligned with the broader interests of society (Levenda et al., 2020).

Constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression should not be understood merely in procedural terms, but as a substantive foundation for fostering critical and sustained participation. In this regard, silence or indifference toward public issues may contribute to the reproduction of inequality and the consolidation of power dominance (Douaisia, 2025; Rollo, 2021). Thus, civil participation must be continuously articulated through various forms such as collective action, public discourse, and other social practices as a means of strengthening substantive democracy. An active and critical citizenry is essential to ensure that democracy does not remain confined to formal procedures, but evolves into a responsive, inclusive, and just system (Han et al., 2026; Orias, 2025). The themes raised by Aksi Kamisan Kaltim originate from various state-related problems and emerging socio-political issues.

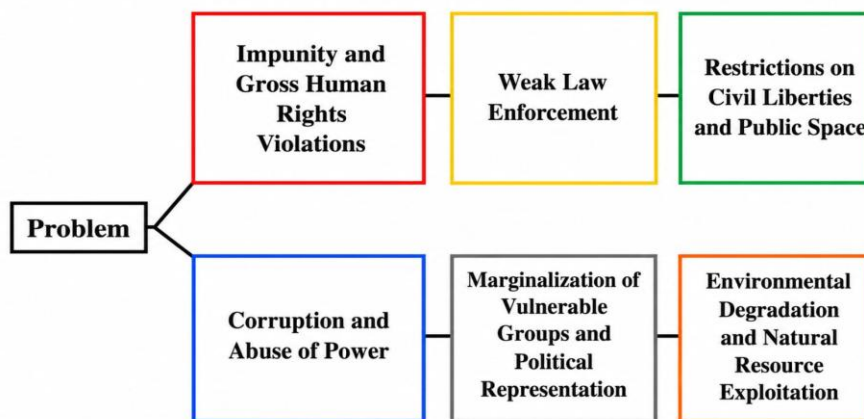


Figure 4. Problem Diagram of Major Issues

Source: Author’s own elaboration, 2026

The figure illustrates a problem mapping that forms the basis of the issues raised by Aksi Kamisan Kaltim, ranging from impunity and gross human rights violations due to weak law enforcement, to restrictions on civil liberties and public space. In addition, corruption and abuse

of power exacerbate the marginalization of vulnerable groups and weaken political representation, while natural resource exploitation contributes to environmental degradation. Overall, these issues reflect the challenges in realizing a just and inclusive democracy and represent the broader themes consistently raised in Aksi Kamisan each year. The following Figure 5 presents a recapitulation of action themes along with the number of participants for each theme.

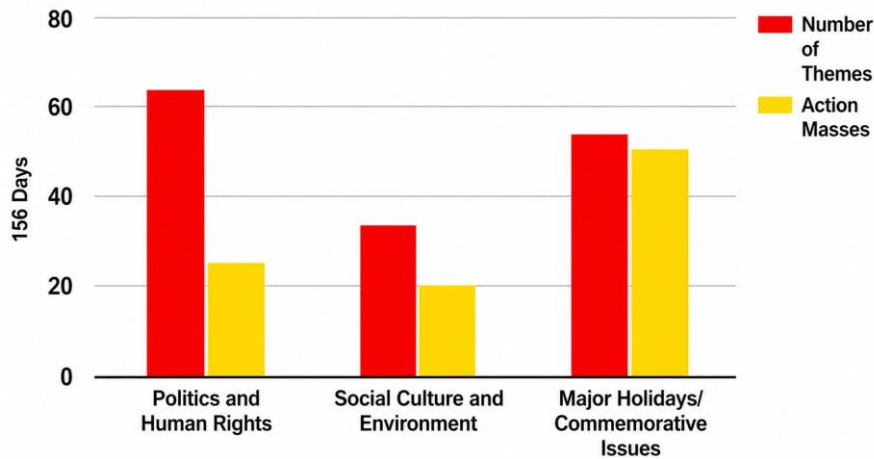


Figure 5. Recapitulation of Aksi Kamisan Kaltim Activities Over the Last Three Years

Source: Author's own elaboration, 2026

Based on the recapitulation of Aksi Kamisan Kaltim activities over the 2023–2025 period, which includes a total of 156 weekly actions held consistently every Thursday, the data were collected through document analysis and triangulation from organizational archives, social media documentation, and field observation notes. The themes of each action were classified using a qualitative content analysis approach, showing that 64 actions focused on political and human rights issues, 35 on social, cultural, and environmental issues, and 55 on commemorative or major holiday-related issues. The average participation was approximately 25 participants for political and human rights themes, 20 for social, cultural, and environmental themes, and 50 for commemorative actions. Overall, these findings indicate the continuity of civic engagement and resistance practices in maintaining democratic space, where despite relatively small participation numbers, the consistency of weekly actions reflects sustained grassroots political expression in public space. Various forms of resistance have been carried out by Aksi Kamisan Kaltim, which will be illustrated in the structural diagram below.

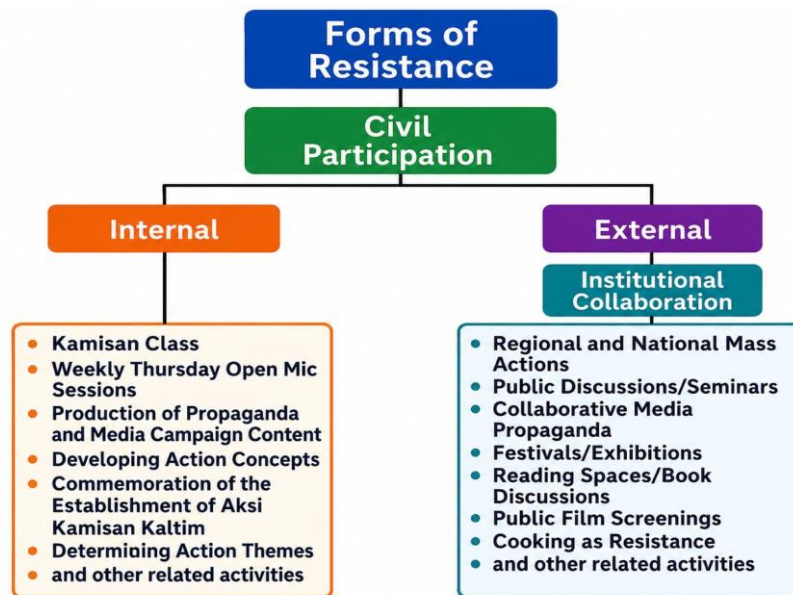


Figure 6. Forms of Resistance of Aksi Kamisan Kaltim

Source: Author’s own elaboration, 2026

The image explains the framework of Forms of Resistance within the context of civil participation, which is divided into two main categories: internal resistance and external resistance. Internal resistance refers to forms of struggle that emerge from within Aksi Kamisan Kaltim, focusing on capacity building, knowledge production, movement consolidation, and strategic preparation through activities such as Kamisan Class, weekly open mic sessions, propaganda and media campaign production, development of action concepts, and other internal practices. Meanwhile, external resistance refers to forms of struggle carried out through engagement with external actors and broader public spaces, such as regional and national mass actions, public discussions or seminars, media collaboration, festivals or exhibitions, reading spaces, film screenings, and practices like “cooking as resistance,” which serve to expand the movement’s reach and build solidarity across different groups. Thus, the key distinction lies in orientation: internal resistance emphasizes consolidation and strengthening the movement from within, while external resistance focuses on expansion and active engagement in the wider public sphere.

Aksi Kamisan Kaltim carries out various forms of resistance, which the author categorizes into two main types: internal and external, based on findings from observations and interviews. Opin (2026), a member of the Aksi Kamisan Kaltim movement, explained various forms of civic participation beyond the traditional action of standing in front of the Governor’s Office, as well as the themes raised in each of the Kamisan actions: “Aksi Kamisan Kaltim raises themes spontaneously in response to emerging public issues as well as specific commemorative moments, with participation fluctuating depending on the level of public attention; during events such as

Indigenous Peoples' Day or Environmental Day, participants are typically dominated by related networks. In responding to the state's failure to fulfill community rights, the movement employs various forms of creative resistance, including the concept of "resistance from the dining table" as a symbol of opposition to the food crisis, as well as activities such as free haircuts, the involvement of disability groups, and cultural initiatives like reading spaces, music, art performances, and pantomime as mediums of resistance."

Aksi Kamisan Kaltim consistently voices local and national issues through open criticism of government policies that are not pro-people, as well as the state's lack of seriousness in resolving human rights violations. Amid widespread land grabbing, suppression of criticism, and criminalization of citizens legitimized through repressive practices by security forces in the name of stability, the consistency of this movement serves as a collective reminder as well as a form of resistance against oppressive power over society.

Moreover, participants of Aksi Kamisan Kaltim remain consistently involved in advocating for community rights by responding to the themes raised in each action, standing up to voice opposition against injustice and violations of humanity. Bachtiar (2026), President of the Student Executive Board (BEM) FISIP Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Samarinda, stated his purpose of joining and voicing aspirations through the Kamisan platform as follows: "My motivation for joining Aksi Kamisan Kaltim is that it is a voice that is consistently carried out every week without interruption, whether in front of the State Palace or in other city centers, demanding that the state has never seriously resolved cases of human rights violations. Many small voices seek justice from the state but are never heard. Despite the lack of certainty, Aksi Kamisan remains consistent and stands firm in refusing to forget the crimes committed by the state, making it a space of reflection for me to think that as a society we are only victims and have never truly experienced the welfare promised by politicians during elections."

In essence, the themes raised by Aksi Kamisan Kaltim encourage civil society to be more sensitive to emerging issues at the local level in East Kalimantan, as well as at the national and international levels, particularly regarding the state's lack of seriousness in resolving ongoing problems. Ikhsan (2026), a student of FISIP Universitas Mulawarman who is involved in Aksi Kamisan Kaltim, utilizes this space as a platform for self-expression: "I began participating in Aksi Kamisan Kaltim when I started my studies as a university student in 2022. My involvement was driven by concern for the nation and by the role and responsibility of students as agents of change. Aksi Kamisan has shaped a critical mindset by voicing social and political conditions in Indonesia. Some of the themes that I find most memorable include the rejection of the discourse on naming Suharto as a national hero, issues of abuse of power and arrest practices during the 1998 era, as well as support for the liberation of Palestine. The theme of Palestinian liberation is

seen as an effort to call for global solidarity in rejecting all forms of colonialism in the world, which must be abolished.”

In this context, Saipul (2026), a political observer and academic at Universitas Mulawarman, emphasized the importance of civil participation in expressing aspirations through creative approaches in public spaces. He stated that society not only has rights but also a responsibility to actively engage in democratic processes by presenting forms of expression that are constructive, innovative, and oriented toward delivering substantive criticism and input on public policies: “There is no shared commitment, and there needs to be a policy that provides space. This space is generally understood by society as democratic engagement in institutions such as the DPRD, provincial government, or city hall. However, there is a need for creativity in redefining democracy by providing spaces for expression and cultural creation. Public space should be utilized by society to express opinions or engage in artistic expression and writing, which can symbolize the diversity of views. These spaces for criticism should function as tools for improvement, reflection, and evaluation of leadership and policies. In today’s context, it seems that the mindset of our political elites in local government and the DPRD has not yet reached this stage. This is the current problem, and we need to raise this awareness within the local government.”

This is reflected in the efforts of Aksi Kamisan Kaltim, which continuously develops creative and innovative forms of resistance through various approaches and collaborations with institutions relevant to the issues being raised, as part of its contribution to maintaining the sustainability of democracy in East Kalimantan. Thus, the findings show that civil participation in Aksi Kamisan Kaltim is not only characterized by sustained engagement, but also by variations in participant numbers and the involvement of diverse actors who contribute to shaping creative forms of resistance. These forms of resistance both internal and external collectively demonstrate that creative practices are not merely symbolic expressions, but function as mechanisms of counter-hegemonic resistance that strengthen movement consolidation while simultaneously expanding the space of civil participation in the public sphere.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to explain how civic resistance in Aksi Kamisan Kaltim is shaped through the contestation of public space, restrictions on democratic expression, and the adaptive strategies of social movements in a localized context. Synthesizing interview accounts, field observations, and documentation of protest activities, the findings show that participation in Aksi Kamisan Kaltim is driven not only by opposition to perceived democratic constraints, but also by the continuous negotiation of visibility within regulated public spaces and digitally mediated

environments. In this sense, civic resistance is not merely symbolic expression, but an evolving political practice shaped by the interaction between structural constraints, institutional governance, and activist agency.

Comparing the findings with previous studies, the Samarinda case supports research that conceptualizes public space as a politically constructed arena rather than a neutral platform for expression. Prior studies emphasize that public space is shaped by power relations that determine access, visibility, and participation (Habermas, 2022; Angga et al., 2023). The findings of this study extend this argument by showing that in East Kalimantan, control over public space does not primarily operate through explicit prohibition, but through procedural governance such as notification requirements, spatial restrictions, and administrative interventions. This pattern reflects a form of regulated openness, where civic participation is formally allowed but substantively constrained in practice, consistent with findings on selective participation mechanisms in public governance (Eckerd & Heidelberg, 2020).

The findings also align with literature on democratic backsliding, which explains democratic decline as a gradual and often subtle process characterized by the narrowing of civil liberties and increasing regulatory control over civic expression. Previous studies highlight that such decline is often facilitated by legal and institutional mechanisms that normalize restrictions under the discourse of order and stability (Ferraz & Finan, 2025; Hossain et al., 2024). In the Indonesian context, similar dynamics have been identified through the expansion of regulatory frameworks governing expression and assembly (Hapsoro & Rofiqi, 2024). In the case of Aksi Kamisan Kaltim, these dynamics are reflected in everyday experiences of administrative pressure, spatial control, and digital surveillance, which together contribute to a chilling effect on civic participation.

From a social movement perspective, the findings support previous research that frames Aksi Kamisan as a form of moral and symbolic resistance grounded in consistency and justice-oriented narratives (Atmojo, 2021; Andini et al., 2024). However, this study extends these arguments by showing that in localized settings such as East Kalimantan, movement strategies are not only symbolic but also highly adaptive to spatial regulation and institutional pressure. The continuity of weekly actions can also be understood through the concept of “circular time,” where repetition functions as a strategy of endurance rather than redundancy, enabling the movement to sustain collective memory and maintain visibility in the public sphere (Elizabeth F Drexler, 2022).

The findings further align with studies on the transformation of civic resistance in the digital era. Previous research highlights that digital platforms have expanded the infrastructure of mobilization while simultaneously introducing new forms of control and fragmentation in public discourse (Jungheer & Schroeder, 2021; Aringga & Meuraksa, 2025). In Aksi Kamisan Kaltim,

digital space functions both as a tool for organizing and as an arena of contestation, where activists face delegitimization, framing struggles, and informational attacks. At the same time, digital media also enables counter-narratives and broader visibility, although these opportunities are often accompanied by risks of surveillance and reputational pressure.

Theoretically, these findings resonate with hegemonic approaches that view power as operating through both coercion and consent. Rather than relying solely on repression, power in public space is also maintained through normalization processes embedded in legal and institutional frameworks. However, the findings also demonstrate that hegemony is never fully stable, as civil society continuously produces counter-hegemonic practices through collective action, symbolic resistance, and alternative discourse formation in both physical and digital spaces (Ciocchini & Khoury, 2021; Suhardi, 2024; Osman, 2025).

Beyond the Indonesian context, the findings also resonate with comparative studies on civic resistance in semi-democratic and hybrid regimes, where public space is increasingly governed through a combination of legal formalism and informal control mechanisms. Similar studies have shown that in such contexts, social movements often do not face outright repression, but instead encounter a “soft control” regime in which bureaucratic procedures, spatial regulation, and selective enforcement are used to manage dissent while preserving an appearance of democratic openness (Eckerd & Heidelberg, 2020). This pattern is consistent with the experience of Aksi Kamisan Kaltim, where protest activities are not entirely prohibited but are continuously negotiated within shifting administrative and spatial boundaries. In this sense, the East Kalimantan case contributes to broader debates on how contemporary authoritarian tendencies operate through dispersed and procedural forms of governance rather than direct coercion, thereby expanding existing understandings of democratic backsliding in localized settings (Ferraz & Finan, 2025; Hossain et al., 2024).

Overall, the findings position Aksi Kamisan Kaltim within broader debates on democratization and civil society, particularly in contexts where democratic space remains formally open but practically constrained. Compared to previous studies on civic movements in Indonesia, this case shows a more complex configuration of democratic restriction that operates through administrative, spatial, and digital mechanisms simultaneously (Cornell et al., 2026; Pinckney et al., 2022). This demonstrates that democratic control is increasingly dispersed and embedded in everyday governance practices rather than concentrated in overt forms of repression.

In addition, the findings confirm that Aksi Kamisan Kaltim functions not only as a site of resistance but also as a platform for amplifying marginalized voices, including Indigenous communities, environmental justice claims, and victims of structural inequality. These dynamics

illustrate how civic resistance is deeply connected to broader socio-political and economic structures that shape development priorities and governance decisions at the local level.

Furthermore, civic resistance in this context reflects a continuous negotiation between constraint and agency. Public space is neither fully open nor fully closed, but constantly reconfigured through interactions between state regulation and civic practices. Rather than eliminating dissent, the state often manages its visibility through procedural and spatial governance, producing what can be described as “managed visibility,” where protest is permitted but tightly regulated within institutional boundaries (Angga et al., 2023; Jungherr & Schroeder, 2021).

Finally, these findings suggest that democratic evaluation in decentralized contexts cannot rely solely on formal institutional indicators. Democratic decline is also produced through everyday practices of governance, spatial control, and discursive framing that gradually narrow civic space. Therefore, democracy should be understood as a dynamic and contested process shaped by ongoing interactions between power, resistance, and adaptation within specific local contexts (Cornell et al., 2026; Pinckney et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the utilization of public space by Aksi Kamisan Kaltim demonstrates how civil society resistance is sustained within a constrained democratic environment. The movement’s presence at Tepian Mahakam and the East Kalimantan Governor’s Office shows that public space is not merely a physical location for assembly, but a contested arena where citizens articulate criticism, preserve collective memory, and negotiate democratic legitimacy with state authority. In relation to the research objectives, the findings indicate that Aksi Kamisan Kaltim uses public space to voice human rights, environmental, indigenous, and social justice issues, while facing restrictions through administrative requirements, spatial control, intimidation, digital attacks, and disruptions to protest infrastructure.

The main implication of these findings is that democratic restriction at the local level does not operate only through direct repression, but also through subtle and routine mechanisms that regulate visibility, access, and participation. Nevertheless, Aksi Kamisan Kaltim responds by developing creative and adaptive forms of civic engagement that expand the meaning of participation beyond formal institutional channels. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by extending Gramscian counter-hegemony into the analysis of localized public space resistance and by refining the concept of the public sphere as semi-open, negotiated, and shaped by power relations. Future studies should compare Aksi Kamisan across different regions in

Indonesia and examine more deeply how digital media transforms contemporary resistance, solidarity building, and democratic participation.

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