
THE POLITICAL MEDIATIZATION OF LBH PADANG IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the political mediatization of LBH Padang using a case study approach. Data were gathered through direct observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, including content from LBH Padang's official platforms and local newspapers. The findings highlight an adaptive mediatization process, showcasing the organization's strategies to enhance institutional capacity, develop innovative programs, and engage in digital activism. This research contributes to discussions on media, civil society, and political power by providing a nuanced understanding of mediatization in Indonesia. It emphasizes how grassroots organizations navigate media dynamics to influence public discourse and advocate for social justice, offering practical insights for similar organizations.

Keywords: Civil society, media logic, mediatization, political logic.

INTRODUCTION

Civil society, a beacon of hope, has played a pivotal role in deepening democratization globally, including in Indonesia (Diamond, 1994; 1999; Hikam, 1996; Aspinall, 2005; Mietzner, 2012; 2013). Despite experiencing suppression under the Suharto regime for three decades (Hadiz & Robison, 2004; 2013; Mudhoffir, 2022), civil society, alongside student movements, contributed to the downfall of Suharto amidst the economic crisis in 1998 (Aspinall, 2005; Ricklefs, 2001). Post-Reformasi in 1998, civil society continued to actively participate in overseeing reforms across various sectors and initiated political mobilization to address crucial public issues in health, labor, media, and elections (Aspinall, 2005; 2013; Mietzner, 2012; 2013; Armando, 2011; Tapsell, 2017). Consequently, post-Reformasi civil society gradually integrated democratization issues into mass media (Arifuddin, 2016). With the advent of the internet era, civil society began utilizing online platforms to build digital social movements (Nugroho, 2007; 2008; Nugroho & Syarief, 2012) and engage in digital activism on the internet and social media spaces (Lim, 2003; 2013). This phenomenon is part of the broader political mediatization facilitated by civil society organizations through digital media platforms.

The mediatization of civil society is a significant but under-researched theme in the study of political mediatization at the local level. Recent studies on political mediatization highlight that the transformation from conventional to internet-based media significantly impacts political actors and organizations, including civil society (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Stromback, 2008; Grafstrom et al., 2015).

This study investigates how the civil society organization LBH (Legal Aid Institute) Padang adapts to digital media platforms to strengthen institutional networks, innovate work programs, and advocate for local political issues through digital activism. LBH Padang is one of the strongest and most consistent civil society networks advocating for the people in Padang City, West Sumatra. Therefore, exploring the relationship and adaptation of LBH Padang to digital media platforms is academically significant at the local level and

intellectually stimulating and crucial for understanding the evolving terrain of civil society engagement and political communication in contemporary Indonesia.

From a statistical perspective, global digital platform adoption indices indicate that digital technology, including the internet, mobile phones, and other digital tools, has rapidly proliferated in many countries, particularly Indonesia, and has been embraced by civil society, businesses, and governments (World Bank, 2016). The number of internet users in Indonesia was 212.9 million in 2023. Concurrently, social media users reached 167.0 million in 2023, and there were 353.3 million mobile connections in early 2023, equivalent to 128.0 percent of the total population (We Are Social & Meltwater, 2023).

This research aims not only to theoretically analyze LBH Padang's adaptation process to digital media platforms to strengthen organizational networks, create innovative work programs, and launch digital activism but also practically to promote a project that deepens local democratization through the roles of civil society organizations and the use of digital media platforms. Given the rapid development of media technologies in various forms, they have become an integral part of social, political, and cultural life (Hjarvard, 2008; Hepp et al., 2010). Consequently, civil society considers media a crucial component of its political agenda, policies, and institutional framework (Esser & Stromback, 2014; Grafstrom et al., 2015). This research, therefore, has significant practical implications for the ongoing exploration of the evolving terrain of civil society engagement and political communication in contemporary Indonesia.

The significance of this research lies in strengthening civil society institutions and the role of digital media in deepening democratization at the local level. By 'deepening democratization, 'we mean the process of making democracy more participatory and inclusive. Post-Reformasi democratization risks being co-opted by oligarchic forces (Hadiz & Robison, 2004; 2013) or evolving toward deepening democracy through institutional innovation in the empowered participatory governance scheme (Fung & Wright, 2003). This study will be instrumental in evaluating the achievements of democracy at the local level in Padang City, West Sumatra.

METHOD

This study adopts an interpretive qualitative approach to formulate a theoretical framework elucidating the intricate relationship between civil society and local media at the grassroots level. The investigation into the political mediatization process between civil society and local media in Padang employs a case study method chosen for its inherent flexibility in accommodating diverse data collection methods relevant to comprehending research issues. Furthermore, this approach is deemed suitable for crafting contextual and contemporary theories (Stake, 1995; Eriyanto, 2001; Baxter et al., 2008; Mahoney, 2007; Yin, 2014).

Data collection unfolds through the researcher's direct observations at the LBH Padang secretariat. Additionally, the documentation encompasses various social movement events, discussions, training sessions, and digital activism activities. This process involves meticulously scrutinizing primary sources and media documentation to ensure a comprehensive dataset. Subsequently, in-depth interviews were conducted with seven key informants, all active participants within LBH Padang.

The political mediatization of LBH Padang is scrutinized through an analytical lens to show civil society activism today in the digital era. Local media coverage from Singgalang Daily and the news content featured on local online media and the LBH Padang website are systematically documented and analyzed. This comprehensive approach aims to capture not only the nuanced portrayal of social issues advocated by LBH Padang but also how LBH Padang utilized its online website and social media to promote digital activism, contributing to a thorough understanding of the mediatization dynamics at play.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Organizational Capacity and Network of LBH Padang

LBH Padang has successfully established a fair and democratic legal system based on Human Rights (HAM) and local wisdom, particularly for protecting the environment and marginalized individuals or groups. The mission of LBH Padang, which is to advocate for eliminating injustice and disparities across legal, social, political, cultural, belief, and gender dimensions, has made significant strides. In the pursuit of its mission, LBH Padang strategically collaborates with key entities such as LP2M (Lembaga Pengkajian dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat), Qbar (People Coalition for Justice Democracy and Human Rights), and Walhi Sumatera Barat. This collaborative approach indicates LBH Padang's commitment to strengthening its social networks and fostering a multidimensional framework encompassing legal, societal, and environmental concerns that have tended to be marginalized by the ruling elites in the last decade (Diki, interview, 28 August 2023).

LBH Padang's activism has been conducted and achieved by providing legal assistance services to the community, promoting the acceleration of good governance implementation-oriented towards social and ecological justice, generating knowledge through various creative platforms for dissemination as counter ideas or discourse to serve as the basis for advocacy and campaigns, developing critical legal and paralegal education, community networks, and positioning LBH Padang as an independent and well-governed home for social movements and legal aid (Indira, interview, 31 July 2023).

For longstanding and enduring activism, LBH Padang recruits its members rigorously through legal education, known as the Kalabahu process, conducted once a year. The membership lasts for nine years. Currently, LBH Padang's funding comes from foreign and domestic sources, although it has yet to match the funding of LBH Medan, which can reach 250 million per year. LBH Padang prioritizes its focus on structural legal assistance rather than handling lightweight and trivial legal cases (Calvin, interview, 27 October 2023).

Since its establishment in the post-reform era, LBH Padang aligns with the overarching agenda of YLBHI Pusat, primarily focusing on providing legal assistance to those in need in West Sumatra. Consequently, LBH Padang must exert additional effort due to the region's abundance and diversity of structural legal cases. Among the various structural and legal cases LBH Padang addresses in West Sumatra are agrarian disputes, sexual violence, mining, natural resource issues, and cases involving the marginalization of specific individuals or groups (Diki, interview, 28 August 2023).

Based on the records from LBH Padang, the cases of restrictions on civil and political freedoms have drastically increased from 2020 to 2023. In 2020, there were only two civil and political freedom violations. The number remained the same in 2021, with 2 cases reported. However, in 2022, there was a decrease to 1 case, followed by a significant surge

in 2023, which saw 12 civil and political rights violations in West Sumatra. Additionally, the criminalization of farmers has risen steadily from 2020 to 2023. This increase is attributed to the disparity in landownership between farmers and large-scale palm oil companies. In 2020, there was 1 case involving two farmers who became victims of criminalization. The following year, 2021, 1 case with four victims was recorded. In 2022, there was again 1 case of farmer criminalization, this time with five victims. However, in 2023, the criminalization of farmers surged dramatically, with 4 cases reported, resulting in 20 farmers becoming victims. Over the past three years, 31 farmers have been affected (Langgam, 2024).

To extend social campaigns at the local level, LBH Padang demonstrates remarkable institutional adaptability to internet-based digital media technology. The organization actively maintains an informative website that comprehensively displays its profile, networks, and advocacy endeavors in West Sumatra. Furthermore, LBH Padang engages extensively on various social media platforms, notably Instagram. These facets underscore the organization's robust adaptation to the digital era, impressively expanding its reach and impact.

LBH Padang's Inclusive Legal Assistance, Human Rights and Democracy

At the heart of LBH Padang's policy agenda is an unwavering commitment to providing structural, legal assistance to communities in need within West Sumatra. This dedication transcends regional boundaries as LBH Padang contemplates extending its impactful legal aid initiatives to the neighboring provinces of Jambi and Riau, recognizing the absence of legal aid institutions in these regions (Calvin, interview, 23 October 2023). With a lean team of 15 personnel, LBH Padang's activists demonstrate unparalleled dedication, engaging in diverse advocacy and legal education agendas, underscoring the organization's robust commitment and workload (Indira, Interview, 31 July 2023).

LBH Padang offered abundant legal assistance from 2020 to 2023 under the middle elite's political pressure in at least 17 cases. These cases include the arrest of human rights defenders, violence against human rights defenders, the dispersal of mass protests, the criminalization of farmers, and obstruction of journalistic work. These incidents also serve as an alarm and indicate that the space for civil liberties in West Sumatra is increasingly narrowing. Among the 17 civil and political freedoms cases, there are 1,821 victims, comprising 756 women and 1,065 men. The typology of victims in civil and political freedoms includes 271 victims from mass protest arrests, 31 victims from the criminalization of farmers, 17 victims of violence against human rights defenders, 1,500 victims from the forced dispersal of mass protests, and two victims from the obstruction of journalistic work (Langgam, 2024). LBH Padang promoted social advocacy for local communities suffering from agrarian conflict in Bidar Alam and Solok. The organization actively engages in the advocacy of mining permits, such as involvement in the revocation of permits for 26 problematic mines in West Sumatra. LBH Padang contributes to the fight against environmental issues, notably concerning the

Batubara Coal Power Plant (PLTU Ombilin Sawahlunto). The organization stands as a fervent advocate for the rights of local communities embroiled in various agrarian conflicts, such as the conflict in Pasaman Barat, asserting their rights to the land and forests of the Mentawai people. LBH Padang takes a principled stance, championing the rights of persons with disabilities and advocating for marginalized groups, including the LGBT community. Furthermore, the organization is at the forefront of addressing instances of sexual violence, advocating for victims of layoffs, defending those affected by evictions,

notably street vendors, and actively participating in the advocacy for laws that wield significant impacts on the Indonesian populace (Diki, interview, 28 August 2023).

LBH Padang's commitment to community empowerment extends beyond legal advocacy. The organization conducts impactful training sessions for local communities and universities, covering essential topics such as media training, boat-making workshops, legal advocacy training, and environmental impact literacy. LBH Padang's programs are strategically designed to foster heightened awareness, instill self-reliance, and empower communities to take preventive actions and resist potential injustices and human rights violations (Calvin, interview, 27 October 2023).

LBH Padang programmatically engages in grassroots empowerment and advocacy initiatives. The organization forges connections within communities, communicates through student networks, promotes social advocacy literacy in universities, and directly advocates for communities across West Sumatra, including Riau and Jambi.

LBH Padang launches paramedic promotions for Human Rights and Democracy and monitors advocacy in various regions, such as the National Strategic Project (PSN) geothermal project in Gunung Talang. LBH safeguards the people there in collaboration with the KAPAL organization. LBH also aids the advocacy of the people for land, including reclaiming the occupation of land due to legal defeat.

LBH has recently attempted to build networks with academics. LBH's agenda includes establishing a People's School for Awareness. LBH also initiates media literacy projects such as JW citizen journalism and the Roehana Project. LBH Padang requires strategic collaboration and has utilized websites and social media to target millennials and Gen Z. In agrarian conflicts, LBH Padang is assisted by grassroots movements of mothers (Diki, interview, 28 August 2023).

Air Bangis's Resistance and LBH Padang's Support under Digital Activism

In late July and early August 2023, thousands of Air Bangis residents took to the streets, gathering in front of the Governor's office and the West Sumatra Regional Police Headquarters. They brought their families, including children, with some falling ill due to the protest actions. In front of the Governor's office, they demanded that the Governor of West Sumatra, Mahyeldi Ansharullah, revoke the proposal for the National Strategic Project (PSN) submitted to the coordinating minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment, as documented in letter No: 070/774/BALITBNAG-2021. The community also urged the Governor to release the land of the Air Bangis community from the production forest area status (Hamzah, 2023). Moreover, the crowd demanded freedom for the community to sell their palm oil produce without hindrance. Unfortunately, the Governor of West Sumatra showed indifference by refusing to meet with them (Pratama, 2023). The residents of Air Bangis have been conducting a peaceful protest for the past five days at the West Sumatra Governor's Office, during which they have faced repression and arbitrary arrests by members of the West Sumatra Police (Kampai, 2023).

Agrarian conflicts in Indonesia in 2023 have resulted in 241 conflict incidents, seizing approximately 638,188 hectares of agricultural land, customary territories, fishing grounds, and residential areas from 135,608 households. A total of 110 conflict incidents have claimed the lives of 608 land rights defenders, attributed to a repressive approach in agrarian conflict areas. This figure places Indonesia at the top among six other Asian countries, including India, Cambodia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Nepal. Many agrarian conflicts remain undocumented or unreported, making the data more indicative. This figure

does not encompass the suffering experienced by women and children as a secondary impact of violations, such as evictions, destruction of homes, agricultural lands, customary territories, fishing grounds, and the wealth contained within them. Most agrarian conflict incidents are longstanding disputes that have persisted for over 20 years, particularly in Indonesia and India. The primary stakeholders causing agrarian conflict outbreaks are corporations (36%), the government (29%), and assertive individual landowners (15%). Government programs and development initiatives are the second leading cause of agrarian conflict outbreaks, including public infrastructure projects such as roads, bridges, airports, or ports. Among the categories of companies involved in land conflicts, agribusiness and plantations, mining, and real estate are the most prominent, including the Air Bangis agrarian conflict (Wijaya, 2024). In front of the West Sumatra Regional Police Headquarters, the Air Bangis community called for releasing two Air Bangis community members who had been arrested, and the Mobile Brigade (Brimob) withdrew from the Air Bangis area (Harisa, 2023). The conflict in Air Bangis is part of the complex agrarian conflict in Pasaman Barat (Afrizal, 2006). Agrarian conflicts in Pasaman have been ongoing since the Suharto era, involving local communities with actors often affiliated with the military and having interests in the palm oil business. The government often supports these actors (Suryani, interview 2 August 2023).

Patterns of agrarian conflict in West Sumatra can vary, but their resolution often involves mass pressure from the community to fight for their land rights. On the other hand, the government employs repressive force to quell community resistance. An agrarian study by YLBHI and Legal Aid Institutes (LBH) offices in 2021 showed that the resolution of agrarian cases, both old and new, remains stagnant. This includes cases involving indigenous communities. Despite frequent protests by the community, the government continues to grant permits and support to private companies, state-owned enterprises, and even the military to operate and control community land. Law enforcement is also involved in resolutions supporting these parties on the state's behalf. Moreover, there is a lack of state accountability in agrarian conflict resolution. Instead, the state or government escalates agrarian conflicts (Wijaya, 2024).

In many cases, communities want their land rights recognized and guaranteed agreements, such as profit-sharing agreements, to be respected until the end. The government should also refrain from granting permission to others to manage community land without providing adequate protection. However, the government is more inclined to support investors who can provide economic benefits. Referring to the democracy theory explained earlier; the community will respond if political elites fail to use their power to side with the community and protect their access to these three vital elements.

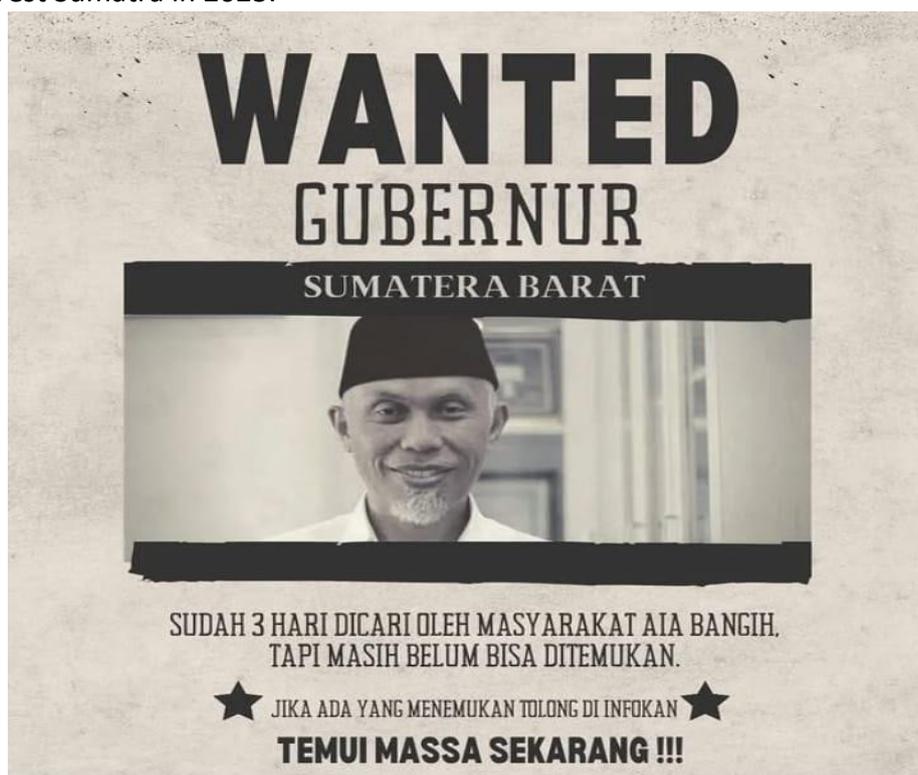
The community will become increasingly active in the form of civil movements protesting political elites who do not prioritize community interests. History has shown many social movements and revolutions worldwide triggered by the harmful policies of ruling elites. Elites will inevitably fall, and the people will undoubtedly prevail.

The Legal Aid Institute (LBH) Padang, in collaboration with various civil society organizations and student movements, has orchestrated actions to champion the rights of the Air Bangis community amidst an agrarian conflict in Pasaman Barat, West Sumatra. LBH Padang actively fosters cross-civil society political networks and extensively advocates for community interests. Moreover, LBH Padang propels activism in the digital sphere by

vocalizing the agrarian conflict issues of Air Bangis in connection with the National Strategic Project (PSN) on their social media accounts.

LBH Padang has utilized diverse digital platforms, encompassing websites and social media, for campaigning and strategic development. The institute operates a website (www.lbhpadang.org). It maintains social media accounts on platforms such as Facebook (Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Padang), Twitter (@LbhPadang), Instagram (lbhpadang), and YouTube (LBH Padang) dedicated to campaigns and advocacy. LBH Padang regularly disseminates updates on its activities and advocacy through these digital social media platforms (Diki, interview, 28 August 2023).

A recent example is LBH Padang presenting a meme featuring the Governor of West Sumatra, Mahyeldi, on their Instagram account with the caption WANTED. This meme responds to Governor Sumbar's reluctance to meet with the Air Bangis community's mass demonstration that persisted six days before the Governor's Office and occupied the Grand Mosque of West Sumatra in 2023.



Figur 1.

LBH Padang's digital activism content to support Air Bangis's people under agrarian crisis in West Sumatera. Source: LBH Padang's IG.

This proactive involvement in digital activism underscores LBH Padang's commitment to leveraging contemporary communication channels to amplify their advocacy efforts. Utilizing memes and social media platforms is a dynamic strategy to engage with a broader audience and draw attention to pressing agrarian issues. This digital activism shows LBH Padang's adaptability to modern media dynamics and underscores the organization's determination to address and publicize social justice concerns in the context of local agrarian conflicts (Rahmanda, 2023).

LBH Padang actively participates in campaigns and advocacy efforts in West Sumatra. This involvement extends to digital activism, notably during the six-day occupation

of the Air Bangis community at the Grand Mosque of West Sumatra, a protest against [specific issue]. A preliminary study by the author underscores the pivotal role of political mediatization within LBH Padang, occurring amidst the expansive development of media and media convergence in West Sumatra, encompassing both traditional mass media and new internet-based digital media.

This transformation significantly impacts professionalism, commercialism, and technological utilization by organizations and media platforms, influencing policy issues, politics, and the role of civil society. LBH Padang, among other civil society organizations, must adapt to the evolving logic and technology of media. Media technologies have become integral to political, social, and cultural life. As exemplified by LBH Padang, civil society organizations perceive media technology as a crucial element in their political agenda, influencing advocacy, policy, and institutional aspects. The political mediatization efforts by civil society organizations like LBH Padang undeniably showcase an intensified commitment to digital activism for campaigns and advocacy. This civil society mediatization is pivotal in deepening democratization in the digital era (Stromback, 2008).

Civil society's significant role in social change and democracy promotion in Indonesia since the 1970s is apparent. However, the last two decades have witnessed challenges stemming from the strengthening power of oligarchy, leading to a stagnation of democracy and a potential weakening of civil society's influence. These challenges include [specific examples of oligarchic influence]. In West Sumatra, LBH Padang strategically contributes to local democracy, actively confronting business interests and governmental tendencies that may compromise the welfare of the people. Despite facing law enforcement repression amid legal advocacy across various sectors, LBH Padang remains steadfast in its commitment to consistency, resilience, and strategic influence in West Sumatra.

CONCLUSIONS

LBH Padang demonstrates remarkable adaptability to the evolving landscape of digital media, fortifying its institutional strength and spearheading innovative programs. Notably, the organization's commitment manifests in organizational initiatives and networks, innovative advocacy programs, and direct engagement with affected regions. LBH Padang's success in actively and strategically driving digital activism in West Sumatra underscores the pivotal role of media in contemporary civil society activities.

The mediatization of politics by LBH Padang emphasizes the indispensability of media in civil society in today's digital era. The interconnected relationship between digital media and civil society organizations has become inseparable, paving the way for impactful advocacy and democratization efforts. This symbiotic relationship, while demanding substantial human and financial resources, underscores the necessity for continued collaboration between media and civil society, highlighting the urgency of this relationship.

This study sheds light on LBH Padang's dynamic adaptation to digital media, unveiling the intricate connections between civil society and media in the digital age. The findings underscore the need for ongoing scholarly exploration to comprehensively grasp the multifaceted dynamics of mediatization within civil society organizations, paving the way for a deeper understanding of their evolving roles in the broader sociopolitical landscape.

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