

Dynamics of Public Deliberation Space in the 2024 Regional Elections in Palembang City and Ogan Ilir Regency

Khairunnas¹, Indra Tamsyah², Adetia Wulindari^{3*}

^{1,2,3}Universitas Sriwijaya, Palembang-Indralaya km. 32 St, Ogan Ilir Regency

Corresponding Author: adetiawulindari@fisip.unsri.ac.id

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Abstract: This study analyzes the public deliberation space in the 2024 regional elections in Palembang City and Ogan Ilir Regency, two regions with distinct socio-political characteristics but recording the lowest levels of political participation in South Sumatra. Palembang, as the provincial capital, is theoretically assumed to have higher political literacy, whereas Ogan Ilir, as a semi-urban region, exhibits distinct dynamics, including the phenomenon of single-candidate races. This situation raises questions about the quality of public deliberation and its relationship to electoral participation and competition. The study used an exploratory qualitative approach, including in-depth interviews and document analysis, with thematic analysis assisted by NVivo 15. The results indicate that the deliberation space remains procedural and not fully inclusive or substantive. Discourse rationality is limited, and the influence of public aspirations on candidate agendas is relatively weak. These findings emphasize the paradox of local democracy: regional modernity does not automatically improve the quality of political deliberation and participation.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy is measured not only by electoral mechanisms but also by the quality of the public communication process that occurs at each stage. This mechanism is also referred to as the public deliberation space, a key element of modern democracy because it provides a forum for citizens to engage in rational, inclusive, and reflective discussions of public issues that affect our shared lives. Public deliberation enables the formation of more informed public opinion through the exchange of arguments, reasoning, and consideration of shared interests, thus enhancing the legitimacy of the resulting political decisions.

Public deliberation plays a key role in modern democratic systems, as it encourages citizen participation in shaping public policy and governance. Participation is crucial for the legitimacy of political decisions. Furthermore, deliberative processes encourage diverse contributions, enrich discussions, and yield more legitimate outcomes in policy contexts (Behringer & Feindt, 2019). It is no less important that the quality of deliberative mechanisms strongly influences perceptions of the legitimacy of democratic institutions and processes (Dryzek et al., 2008).

The interactive dialogue generated through public deliberation spaces allows citizens to express diverse views, discuss differing perspectives, and collaborate to achieve shared goals and interests. The benefits of public deliberation are a crucial component in creating a responsive and accountable democracy (Carpini et al., 2004). In addition, deliberative dialogue can increase collective understanding and build trust among participants, which are vital components of a healthy democratic process (Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2014). Moreover, public deliberation plays an increasingly important role in determining the legitimacy of political decisions. The deliberative framework asserts that legitimacy is not only derived from effective government outputs, but also significantly from inclusive, participatory processes (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006).

In Indonesia, democratic practices, particularly local democracy in regional head elections (Pilkada), are a strategic arena for public deliberation. In principle, Pilkada serves not only as a means of leadership change but also as a space for interaction between candidates and citizens

in discussing visions, missions, and public policy agendas. Ideally, the Pilkada process opens equal participation for all community groups, encourages rational public discourse, and allows citizens' aspirations to influence candidates' political agendas. However, in many cases, Pilkada still faces various problems, such as limited public space inclusiveness, the dominance of symbolic political communication, and the weak influence of public aspirations on the political agendas candidates promote.

Based on bibliometric mapping, studies of public deliberation still tend to focus on general concepts such as deliberation, participation, deliberation quality, and deliberative systems. While discussions more closely related to local electoral political practices have not yet delved into the key issues that determine the functioning of public space in regional elections. This gap is crucial because the dynamics of regional elections are not only about the presence or absence of discussion space, but also about who is truly involved and heard, the extent to which public conversations proceed with verifiable arguments and not merely slogans or personal attacks, and how deliberation space interacts with campaign interests, actor strategies, and prioritized issues. Furthermore, studies of regional elections in Indonesia tend to focus on electoral aspects, voting behavior, and election management, while analyses that position regional elections as a space for public deliberation remain relatively limited, particularly at the local level. In fact, a deliberative democracy approach provides a valuable analytical framework.

It is important to assess the extent to which local political processes can create public communication that is inclusive, rational, and has a substantive impact on policy.

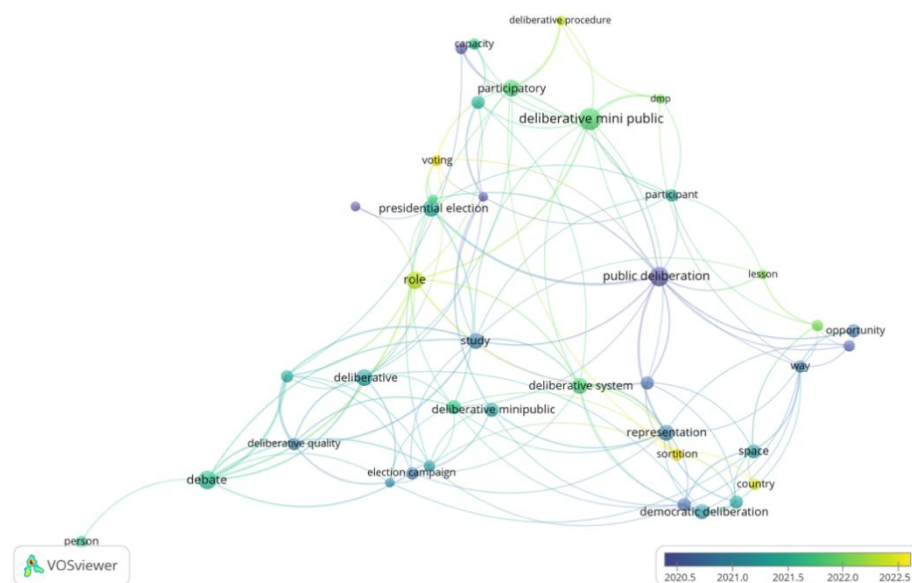


Figure 1. Bibliometric Mapping
Source: processed by the author

Previous studies have shown that cities with strong institutional capacity and democratic infrastructure can generate relatively high levels of public participation in regional elections, particularly when there is easy access to public information and when inclusive deliberation spaces, such as citizen forums, public consultations, and operational participatory budgeting mechanisms, are designed. For example, in the post-reform city of Rome, the mayoral election showed strong voter mobilization alongside institutional changes and the dynamics of the city's political class, suggesting that institutional reforms can increase long-term participation when the legal context and political culture support citizen participation (Fava, 2025).

Furthermore, a study of larger Polish cities in developed macro-regions shows that institutional capacity and participation opportunities influence the participation index, with the quality of public services and quality of life being key drivers of citizen mobilization in both urban and semi-urban cities (Paw et al., 2025). Within a global framework, the literature on governance and adaptive development in peri-urban Mexico City highlights that community engagement, trust in institutions, and local adaptive capacity play key roles in enhancing the legitimacy of

public policies through consultation mechanisms and ongoing public dialogue spaces (Torres-lima et al., 2022).

These results generally indicate that urban/semi-urban cities with more established institutional ecosystems and inclusive information infrastructure tend to achieve higher levels of participation, although barriers for marginalized groups remain a key determining factor when effective deliberation mechanisms are absent.

In Indonesia, in the 2024 regional elections, Palembang City and Ogan Ilir Regency were the two regions in South Sumatra with the lowest participation rates, at 64.04% and 66.11%, respectively. This is despite the fact that, in a regional context, Palembang is a metropolitan city, and Ogan Ilir is a buffer zone with urban/semi-urban characteristics, both of which are open to access to information and basic services, both of which are crucial factors in public participation.

Table 1. South Sumatra Participation Index in the 2024 Regional Elections

No	District/City	Index
1	Pagar Alam	86,81
2	Lahat	82,16
3	Ogan Komering Ulu	81,02
4	Muratara	80,99
5	Penukal Abab Lematang Ilir	80,24
6	Prabumulih	80,16
7	Lubuklinggau	79,86
8	Ogan Komering Ulu Timur	77,88
9	Musi Rawas	77,80
10	Ogan Komering Ilir	74,14
11	Empat Lawang	72,37
12	Ogan Komering Ulu Selatan	71,89
13	Musi Banyuasin	71,79
14	Muara Enim	68,05
15	Banyuasin	66,59
16	Ogan Ilir	66,11
17	Palembang	64,04

Source: Detik.com

Based on these conditions, this study aims to analyze the public deliberation space in the 2024 regional elections in Palembang City and Ogan Ilir Regency. The theory used in this study is the theory of deliberative democracy proposed by Dryzek et al., which emphasizes the public deliberation space on three main dimensions: the inclusiveness of the public space, the rationality of public discourse, and the influence of deliberation on the political agenda (Bächtiger et al., 2018). Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the study of deliberative democracy at the local level by providing empirical evidence from the context of electoral politics in Indonesia, while also testing the relevance and operationalization of the concepts of inclusivity, rationality, and the influence of deliberation in the practice of procedural democracy. In practice, this study provides a basis for recommendations for election organizers, political actors, and civil society on designing and strengthening a more inclusive, substantive, and discourse-oriented public participation space to encourage improvements in the quality of local democracy.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative, descriptive-exploratory approach to analyze the public deliberation space in depth and context during the 2024 regional elections in Palembang City and Ogan Ilir Regency. Qualitative research was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive

understanding of the dynamics of discourse, relationships between actors, and deliberative practices in the local political context. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants, including election organizers, election supervisory bodies, community leaders, and political observers. Secondary data, including official documents, policy archives, and published materials related to the regional elections, were used to complement and contextualize the field findings. Data analysis was conducted using a Qualitative Content Analysis approach through open coding stages (open coding) to identify initial themes, followed by axial coding (axial coding) to group relationships between themes and build analytical categories. The coding process was carried out iteratively by the researcher, who served as the main research instrument. NVivo 15 was used to manage data, facilitate coding, and map relationships between categories, but the entire process of interpretation and meaning drawing was still carried out by the researcher. To maintain the validity and credibility of the data, this study employed source triangulation by comparing information from multiple informant groups and relevant official documents. In addition, repeated reading and cross-verification of the data were carried out to ensure consistency and depth of interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Public deliberation is a crucial aspect of democracy, reflecting an open discussion process in which citizens strive to reach consensus on shared issues. In this context, public deliberation can be understood as a mechanism through which individuals discuss public questions, creating space for more inclusive and participatory decision-making. The link between public deliberation and regional head elections (Pilkada) is significant. Pilkada is a means by which community aspirations are tested through a process to identify worthy leaders. Furthermore, a study by Mardianto et al. emphasized that deliberative democracy extends to the development planning process; this approach can increase public ownership of the development agenda (Mardianto et al., 2022). With a deliberation mechanism, citizens become not merely objects but also active participants.

Based on the results of research conducted regarding the practice of public deliberation in regional head elections in Palembang City and Ogan Ilir Regency, it is described as follows:

Table 2. Comparison of Public Deliberation Practices in the 2024 Palembang City and Ogan Ilir Regency Regional Elections

Dimensions	Palembang City	Ogan Ilir Regency
<i>Inclusiveness of Public Space</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The KPU is actively conducting outreach to first-time voters, border communities, and people with disabilities. 2. Provision of accessible polling stations (no stairs, sufficient space for wheelchairs). 3. Optimization of social media by Bawaslu as a public communication channel. 4. Vertical communication (organizers–community) is relatively structured. 5. Inclusivity is still formal and has not fully touched on the substance of participation. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bawaslu involves groups of people with disabilities in the Participatory Supervisory program. 2. Socialization was carried out, but not yet intensively on substantive aspects. 3. Public communication is still limited and has not optimally reached all vulnerable groups. 4. The nature of participation tends to be symbolic/formal.

The Rationality of Public Discourse

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The campaign was relatively orderly and scheduled according to regulations. 2. The public debate received a positive response from the public. 3. There is an increase in quality compared to the previous regional elections. 4. Social media monitoring to prevent hoaxes. 5. Candidates' answers are often normative and lack depth, and the discourse is still colored by image building. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The public debate was less competitive because there was only one candidate pair. 2. The debate format is more about conveying visions and missions and answering panelists (minimal argumentation). 3. Discourse tends to be one-way. 4. Communicative rationality has not developed optimally due to limited contestation. |
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Deliberation and Influence on the Political Agenda

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discussion forums and spaces for absorbing aspirations are available. 2. Technical aspirations (e.g. Braille, disabled companions) are accommodated in the technical rules. 3. Candidates welcome public input, although implementation depends on the candidate's commitment. 4. The vision and mission were prepared by a third party so they do not fully reflect public aspirations. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Large discussion forums are relatively inactive. 2. The campaign is more limited and based on informal networks (family/community leaders). 3. Public aspirations have not been institutionalized in the candidates' political agendas. 4. The influence of deliberation on agenda formulation is still weak. |
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Inclusiveness of Public Space in Regional Elections

One element that constitutes the public deliberation space in regional elections is the inclusiveness of the public space. The inclusiveness of public space in the regional elections of Palembang City and Ogan Ilir Regency is illustrated in the following interview information map:

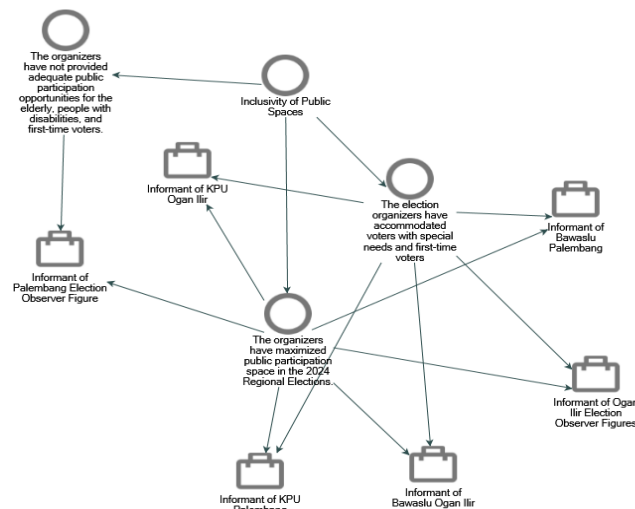


Figure 2. Inclusiveness of Public Space
 Source: Processed by Researchers based on Interview Results

The figure above demonstrates the relationship structure between election actors and the issues that shape the public deliberation space. The concept of public space inclusivity is central to the network, highlighting the importance of equal access to political participation for all levels of society. The mapping results demonstrate that, on the one hand, election organizers are deemed to have made efforts to maximize public participation in the 2024 regional elections, particularly by providing broader facilities and outreach programs.

The provision of socialization programs to the disabled, elderly, and beginners in Ogan Ilir Regency has been carried out, as stated by an informant from the Ogan Ilir Regency Election Supervisory Agency, who explained that:

"In addition to our P2P activities, we also engage with people with disabilities. Last November, we held a Participatory Supervisory program specifically for our friends with disabilities. We don't discriminate between elderly and disabled individuals."

In addition, based on an interview with one of the commissioners of the Palembang City KPU, the same program was also implemented by the Palembang City KPU. The informant explained that:

"The Palembang City Election Commission (KPU) actively facilitated the participation of diverse groups, including communities in border areas and people with disabilities. They held special outreach programs and ensured accessible polling stations (TPS), such as those with no stairs and large wheelchair spaces."

However, from a different perspective, interviews with election observers who are also community leaders in South Sumatra revealed that this space is not yet fully inclusive, especially for citizens with special needs and first-time voters, who received less attention in the socialization process.

"Not yet, they're still just a formality. Intense, but not anything serious. South Sumatra isn't capable of that yet."

The visualization of information between informants from the General Elections Commission (KPU), Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), and election observers/community leaders illustrates the existence of two layers of communication in the election public space: vertical communication between election organizers and the public, and horizontal communication between citizens through groups of democracy observers and observers. Vertical communication patterns tend to be formal and institutional, while horizontal communication exhibits a freer discursive dynamic, though it remains limited in conveying aspirations to the policy level. In the context of Dryzek's theory, this condition indicates that rational communication has begun to take shape through public discourse, but inclusivity has not been fully realized because access barriers remain for certain groups.

This research reinforces the concept that the inclusiveness of public spaces is a key factor facilitating participation. Through effective communication strategies, such as social media and collaboration with community leaders, there is potential to expand access to information and motivate public engagement. For example, the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) in Palembang, which uses social media as its primary channel, has proven effective in reaching a wider audience and fostering more interactive dialogue (Effendi et al., 2025). However, challenges remain, such as the spread of misinformation that can disrupt the deliberative process and reduce the quality of public participation. Furthermore, a robust deliberative process in the public sphere will encourage citizens to take an active role in decision-making, thereby making local democracy more participatory and responsive to public needs. When citizens feel engaged and have access to relevant information, they are more motivated to participate in meaningful public dialogue, which in turn can strengthen the quality of democracy at the local level (Tryatmoko, 2023).

The Rationality of Public Discourse in Regional Elections

In addition to inclusivity, the rationality of public discourse is also crucial in assessing the space for public deliberation. Based on the research conducted, several pieces of information were obtained from research informants, which are visualized as follows:

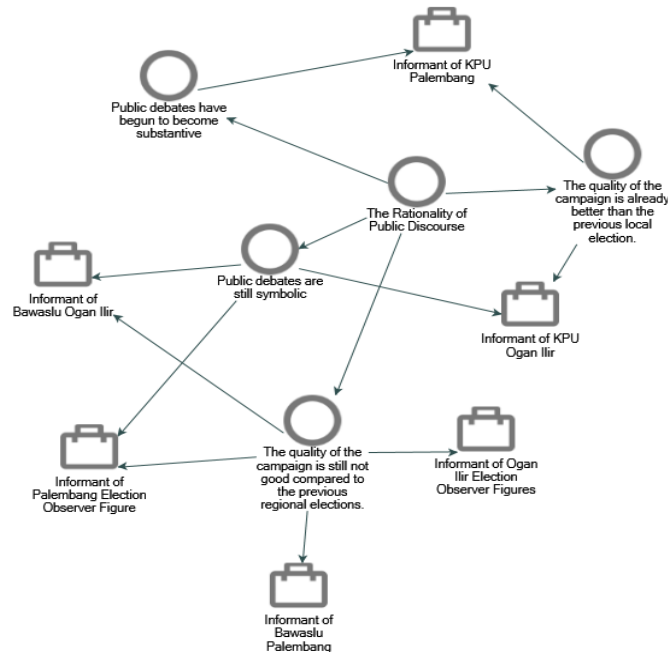


Figure 3. Rationality of Public Discourse

Source: Processed by Researchers based on Interview Results

Based on the figure above, two main tendencies in the rationality of public discourse are evident. First, an optimistic view emerges, stating that public debate has become more substantive, as an informant from the Palembang Election Commission (KPU) noted that the quality of the campaign in this regional election was better than in previous elections. He explained that:

"The campaign proceeded relatively orderly and within specific time zones. The KPU monitored the campaign on social media to prevent hoaxes, but the primary focus was ensuring there were no procedural violations."

This indicates a shift from ceremonial political communication to a more rational form of deliberation, in which arguments, visions, and policies take center stage rather than mere political image-building. From Dryzek's perspective, this indicates progress in this dimension of communicative rationality, where public spaces began to be used for the exchange of reasons oriented towards common interests.

However, the second trend reveals a critical side, highlighting that public debate remains largely symbolic and that the campaign's quality has not been entirely satisfactory compared to previous elections. This finding was conveyed by informants from the Ogan Ilir Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), the Palembang Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), and local political observers, who observed that much of the debate was still directed at image-building and personal attacks between candidates, rather than the substance of public policies offered to address public issues. This is reinforced by the statement made by one of the research informants, a community leader in Palembang City, who explained that:

“Compared to Java or other places, the differences are stark. Here, the vision and mission statements are fake and drafted by a third party. Ironically, the organizers didn't test them before they became the vision and mission statements.”

The relationship between election organizers (the General Elections Commission (KPU) and Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) and political observers also revealed tensions between the ideals of deliberation and political practice on the ground. Organizers sought to strengthen the public debate format as a deliberative forum, while observers found that the debates often failed to encourage rational citizen participation due to time constraints, the dominance of certain candidates, and poor moderator performance in maintaining substantive discourse. Meanwhile, an informant from the Palembang City General Elections Commission (KPU) explained that:

“The public debate received a positive response from the public, but there was criticism that the candidates' answers were sometimes too brief and unsatisfying. The public was seen as being critical in assessing the candidates' performance.”

This situation shows that the public sphere, in the context of the Palembang and Ogan Ilir regional elections, is still in the deliberative transition stage, where the argumentative process has not yet fully taken root as a political culture.

The rationality of public discourse in the context of the 2024 regional elections in Ogan Ilir Regency and Palembang City shows positive developments, although it has not yet reached the ideal deliberative stage. In Ogan Ilir Regency, in particular, the candidate debates were still suboptimal, with only one candidate pair. This was explained by an informant from the Ogan Ilir Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) as follows:

“So when they debate, they just answer questions from the panelists. So, I just conveyed my vision and mission and answered questions from the panelists.”

This illustrates that the transition from public discourse dominated by certain voices must be transformed into a more inclusive and reflective dialogue, in which public participation plays an important role in shaping public opinion and the decisions of the authorities.

According to Habermas, the ideal public sphere is a space where public opinion is formed through rational discussion among all members of society (Habermas et al., 1974). Without adequate access for all levels of society to participate in the discussion process, the rationality developed will tend to be biased and fail to represent collective needs. Parkinson's view emphasizes the shift from an actively involved citizen to a more passive one, resulting from the separation between ordinary citizens and experts in the deliberative process (Parkinson, 2004).

Deliberation and Political Agenda in Regional Elections

Based on Dryzek's concept of Deliberative Democracy, an equally important element is the Influence of Deliberation on the Political Agenda. The results of this study illustrate collective information from several sources related to this element. The results are described as follows:

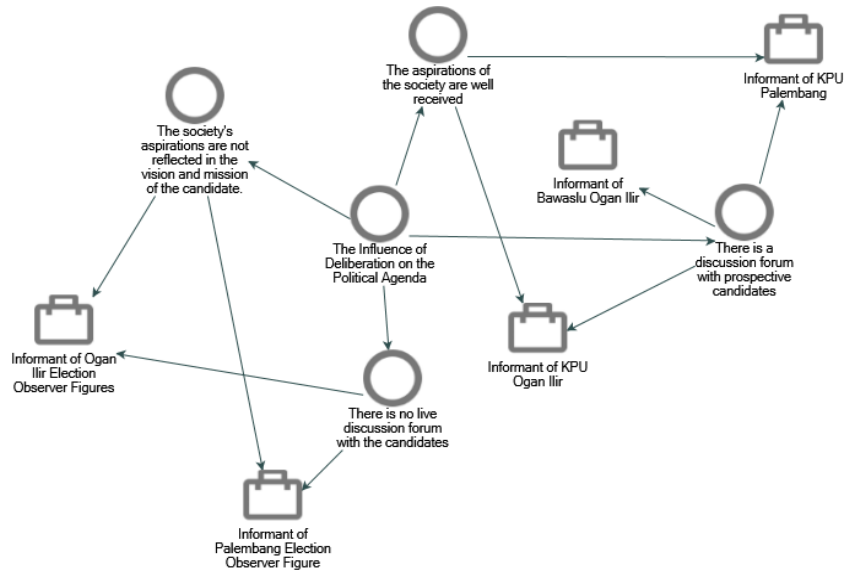


Figure 4. The Influence of Deliberation on the Political Agenda
Source: Processed by Researchers based on Interview Results

The figure above demonstrates differences in perception and experience among the actors involved, particularly between election organizers (the General Elections Commission (KPU) and Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) and local election observers. Some informants, such as those from the Palembang KPU and the Ogan Ilir Bawaslu, assessed that public aspirations had been well received through various discussion forums held with regional head candidates. As explained by an informant from the Ogan Ilir Regency Bawaslu:

"This (socialization of aspiration absorption) is still being carried out, starting from limited meeting rooms, discussion forums, and other forms of campaigning that are carried out."

This is in line with the explanation given by the informant from the Palembang City KPU, who explained that:

"The General Elections Commission (KPU), as the election organizer, has gathered public input, including proposals for Braille and assistance for people with disabilities, which have been integrated into the technical regulations. Candidates have also received extensive public input for their campaigns. Whether they consider this input or not is up to them."

This situation indicates a form of deliberation that is beginning to open up space for public participation in determining the direction of the political agenda. Public discussion forums held by the General Elections Commission (KPU), although still limited in scale and format, provide a platform for the public to express their views, input, and critique candidates' programs. In the context of Dryzek's theory, this reflects efforts toward inclusive deliberation, namely, public involvement in shaping rational and reflective political discourse.

However, from a different perspective, a community leader from Palembang City expressed a more critical view, stating that the public's aspirations were not fully reflected in the candidates' visions and missions. He explained that:

"They're just saying hello, nothing more. Yes, because the ones who developed the vision and mission weren't them, but a third party."

Furthermore, it was explained that direct discussion forums with candidates had not been effective, and in some cases, were not even conducted openly. This assertion was further supported by a statement from an informant from an Ogan Ilir community leader who explained:

"There are no large-scale campaigns or large-scale discussion forums. Now, we do it on a smaller scale through families or community leaders."

This indicates a deliberative deficit, in which the public communication process remains dominated by a formalistic approach and lacks mechanisms to ensure that citizens' voices are truly incorporated into the political agenda.

One of the key factors influencing deliberation outcomes is the communication strategy adopted by political parties, particularly in reaching young voters. In this era, digital campaigns are a highly effective tool for increasing young voter participation, a strategic demographic group in political contestation (Rizky, 2025). In the context of Palembang City and Ogan Ilir Regency, digital campaigns can be an important tool to facilitate deliberation between candidates, parties, and the public, so that the political agenda carried can be more relevant and inclusive, considering that Palembang City is the provincial capital where the majority of the population is urban and their daily lives significantly use technology, and Ogan Ilir Regency is a buffer zone where community activities overlap.

Meanwhile, lowering the nomination threshold can also broaden political party involvement in the deliberative process, as it provides parties with an opportunity to prepare and strengthen their leadership on social issues (nugroho, 2025). This indicates that political parties need to improve themselves to meet public expectations, particularly by exploring local issues.

A good public deliberation space must possess strong democratic qualities. According to Diamond and Morlino, the quality of democracy can be measured by several dimensions, including political participation, political competition, and the protection of civil rights and political freedoms (Hasanuddin et al., 2021). In Palembang City and Ogan Ilir Regency, significant challenges exist in ensuring effective participation. Several studies have shown that despite the existence of communication and participation mechanisms, the ongoing practice of money politics hinders the creation of healthy deliberation. This results in a suboptimal deliberation space, as public voices are distorted by unfair political interests (Khairi, 2020).

Based on the analysis above, one deliberative campaign model emphasizes that the campaign should not only be a promotional event for the candidate but also a deliberative space to discuss the candidate's vision and mission with constituents. The implementation of this model is expected to expand access to information and improve voter considerations before the voting period (Dewansyah, 2015).

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that the public deliberative space in the 2024 local elections in Palembang City and Ogan Ilir Regency has not evolved into a substantive arena for the exchange of ideas, but instead remains largely procedural and decorative. Although the General Election Commission (KPU) and the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) have formally established various channels for public participation, their institutional design remains dominated by a top-down approach, in which agendas, formats, and mechanisms for incorporating public aspirations are determined administratively without meaningful co-creation with citizens. Consequently, deliberative forums function more as instruments of policy socialization than as inclusive spaces for reciprocal dialogue, and vulnerable groups—including persons with disabilities, first-time voters, and marginalized communities—have not been substantively integrated into the political agenda-setting process. In the context of Palembang, an urban area, and Ogan Ilir, a semi-urban region with relatively low participation rates in South Sumatra, these findings reveal a paradox of local democracy: social modernity and administrative advancement do not automatically guarantee the quality of public deliberation. Moreover, the growing prominence of image-based politics in the 2024 local elections has reinforced the performative character of public debates,

privileging symbolic representation over programmatic argumentation. As a result, communicative rationality has yet to become embedded in local political culture, and public aspirations expressed in deliberative spaces have not been systematically translated into revised visions, missions, or policy agendas of the candidates. Accordingly, this study recommends strengthening the institutional design of deliberation through more binding regulatory mechanisms, such as requiring candidates to publicly clarify, revise, and refine their vision and mission statements following public debates as a form of deliberative accountability. This should be accompanied by a shift toward more bottom-up and participatory models of engagement, including the direct involvement of vulnerable groups in shaping debate agendas and evaluating deliberative forums. This study is limited by its focus on two localities and its use of a descriptive-exploratory qualitative approach; therefore, the findings are not intended for statistical generalization. Future research employing comparative designs and mixed-method approaches is necessary to broaden understanding of the dynamics of deliberation and participation in Indonesian local democracy.

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