


Bridging the State and Society: Legislative Recess, Public Aspirations, and Institutional Mediation in Subnational Indonesia

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Luh Lisna Aprilia^{1*}, I Putu Dharmanu Yudartha²

¹ Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik Universitas Udayana, Bali 80361, Indonesia

² Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik Universitas Udayana, Bali 80361, Indonesia

*hereaprilia@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines legislative recess practices of Regional People's Representative Councils (DPRD) as a mechanism mediating state–society relations in subnational Indonesia. It investigates how public aspirations are articulated, filtered, and institutionalized through recess activities, and assesses whether these practices function as substantive democratic mediation or merely symbolic rituals. Drawing on a qualitative case study of the Bali Provincial DPRD, the study employs in-depth interviews with legislators, DPRD Secretariat officials, and community representatives, alongside document analysis of recess reports, meeting records, and regulatory frameworks. Data were analyzed thematically using perspectives from political sociology and governance studies. This article makes three novel contributions. First, it reconceptualizes legislative recess as a form of institutional mediation rather than a procedural extension of legislative representation. Second, it empirically demonstrates the central role of supporting bureaucracies—particularly the DPRD Secretariat—as active mediators shaping the translation of public aspirations into policy outcomes. Third, it advances a relational understanding of subnational democracy by revealing how symbolic representation and material governance processes intersect to reproduce participatory inequalities. The findings show that the effectiveness of recess practices is contingent upon institutional capacity, budgetary constraints, and uneven political literacy. Strengthening mediating institutions and inclusive participation is therefore essential for enhancing democratic governance at the subnational level.

Keywords: Democratic Mediation, Institutional Capacity, Legislative Recess, Political Sociology, State–Society Relations

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INTRODUCTION

Representative democracy relies not only on electoral competition but also on everyday institutional practices that mediate interactions between the state and citizens. While elections provide periodic moments of authorization, democratic legitimacy is continuously negotiated through routine mechanisms that connect public aspirations to policy-making processes (Mujani & Liddle, 2021; Tyson, 2021). In many decentralized political systems, these mechanisms operate at the subnational level, where legislative institutions are expected to translate local demands into actionable governance outcomes. In Indonesia, legislative recess activities of Regional People's Representative Councils (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah, DPRD) are formally designed to serve this mediating function. Through recess, legislators temporarily leave parliamentary chambers to engage directly with constituents, gather public aspirations, and channel them into legislative deliberation and regional

development planning.

Despite its normative importance, the practical operation of legislative recesses in Indonesia has raised persistent concerns. Empirical observations across regions indicate that recess activities often suffer from low public awareness, uneven participation, and weak policy follow-up. Aspirations articulated during recess meetings are frequently documented but fail to materialize in concrete policy outputs, generating public skepticism toward representative institutions. These challenges are not merely anecdotal. Studies on local governance in Indonesia have repeatedly highlighted procedural compliance without substantive responsiveness as a recurring feature of subnational democratic practices (Ayres, 2022; Escobar, 2022; Røiseland, 2022). The persistence of these patterns suggests that recess should be examined not simply as a technical obligation but as a social and institutional practice shaped by power relations, organizational capacity, and administrative routines.

The case of Bali Province illustrates this paradox with particular clarity. Bali is often portrayed as possessing strong social capital, dense communal networks, and a vibrant tradition of civic engagement rooted in customary institutions (Wicaksana, 2021). At the same time, legislative recesses in Bali encounter familiar structural constraints, including limited regional budgets, dependence on bureaucratic support units, and disparities in political literacy among citizens. These conditions affect who participates, which aspirations are articulated, and how those aspirations are processed once they enter institutional channels. Consequently, recess becomes a site where democratic ideals of representation intersect with bureaucratic filtering and political prioritization. Understanding this intersection is crucial for assessing whether recess functions as a genuine bridge between state and society or primarily as a symbolic performance of responsiveness.

Existing scholarship on Indonesian legislatures has largely approached DPRD from a normative and institutional perspective. Early studies emphasized the formal roles of DPRD within decentralized governance, focusing on legislative authority, budgeting power, and oversight functions (Hadiwasito, 2024; Marsallindo & Safitri, 2021; Siregar, 2023). Within this framework, recess is typically treated as an administrative requirement, evaluated through indicators such as frequency of implementation, reporting compliance, and alignment with regulatory standards. While such analyses are valuable, they offer limited insight into how public aspirations are socially constructed, negotiated, and transformed within legislative processes.

Another strand of literature situates legislative practices within broader debates on participation and local governance. Drawing on theories of participatory governance, these studies emphasize citizen involvement as a means to enhance accountability and policy effectiveness (Rassanjani & Meesonk, 2025; Simpson et al., 2025). In Indonesia, this perspective has predominantly focused on formal participatory mechanisms such as development planning forums (*musrenbang*), participatory budgeting, and community-driven development programs (Rosamond & Dupont, 2025; Tambunan, 2023). Legislative recesses, however, remain marginal within this body of work, often perceived as secondary or

complementary rather than as central arenas of democratic mediation.

Internationally, research on state–society relations has advanced through deliberative democracy and governance frameworks that foreground dialogue, inclusion, and communicative rationality (Dunn, 2023; Walkenhorst & Schuppert, 2025). These approaches have generated rich analyses of public hearings, citizen assemblies, and consultative forums, particularly in advanced democracies (Asimakopoulos et al., 2025; Moriolkosu et al., 2025; Sunah & Yudarta, 2025). Yet, they rarely engage with legislative recess practices, especially in subnational contexts of the Global South where institutional capacity, administrative mediation, and informal power relations play a decisive role. As a result, a significant portion of everyday democratic practice remains under-theorized.

Insights from political sociology and institutional theory further complicate this picture by demonstrating that political outcomes are shaped not only by elected officials but also by bureaucratic actors and organizational routines (Beay et al., 2025; Hapsari & Prabawati, 2025; Yogi et al., 2024). Bureaucracies act as mediators that translate political signals into administrative categories, thereby influencing which issues gain visibility and which are marginalized. In the context of DPRD, the Secretariat plays a pivotal yet often overlooked role in organizing recess activities, documenting public input, and aligning aspirations with planning and budgeting frameworks (Pradnyani & Prabawati, 2025; Sulaiman et al., 2024; Zakiyah & Akbar, 2025). Despite its centrality, this bureaucratic dimension has received scant analytical attention in studies of legislative representation in Indonesia.

Against this backdrop, this article approaches legislative recess not as a procedural add-on but as a form of institutional mediation embedded in everyday governance. By examining how public aspirations are articulated, filtered, and institutionalized through recess practices, the study moves beyond formalistic evaluations of legislative performance. The focus on Bali Province allows for a nuanced exploration of how socio-cultural contexts, administrative capacity, and power relations intersect in shaping democratic mediation at the subnational level. Rather than treating mediation as a neutral transmission of preferences, this analysis highlights its relational and symbolic dimensions.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the operation of legislative recess as a mediating mechanism between the state and society in subnational Indonesia. Specifically, it seeks to examine the processes through which public aspirations are managed, the role of supporting bureaucratic institutions in shaping representational outcomes, and the structural conditions that enable or constrain effective democratic mediation. By foregrounding these dynamics, the article contributes to socio-political scholarship by integrating political sociology with governance studies, offering a more comprehensive understanding of representative democracy beyond electoral moments.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to capture the complexity of legislative recess as an institutional mediation practice embedded in everyday governance. A

qualitative design is particularly suitable because the research seeks to understand meanings, interpretations, and interactions rather than to measure predefined variables or test causal relationships. Legislative recess operates as a socially constructed process shaped by actors' perceptions, institutional routines, and contextual constraints, which cannot be adequately examined through quantitative indicators alone. Qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to explore how public aspirations are articulated, negotiated, and filtered within legislative and bureaucratic settings, and how these processes are experienced by different actors involved (Alam, 2020; Kwar et al., 2024; Priya, 2021).

The research is designed as a case study focusing on the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) of Bali Province. The case study approach enables an in-depth and context-sensitive examination of a bounded institutional setting, making it appropriate for analyzing complex governance practices in their real-life context (Susanto et al., 2024; Taquette & Souza, 2022). Bali was selected for both substantive and analytical reasons. Substantively, Bali represents a province with relatively strong social capital, a dense network of customary institutions, and a long experience with post-reform local democracy. Analytically, these characteristics provide a critical case for examining whether legislative recess functions effectively as a bridge between state and society under relatively favorable socio-cultural conditions. If mediation remains constrained in such a context, the findings offer broader implications for subnational governance in Indonesia.

Data collection involved multiple sources to capture diverse perspectives on recess practices. Primary data were obtained through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with twenty informants. These included eight members of the Bali Provincial DPRD who had actively conducted recess activities, six officials from the DPRD Secretariat responsible for organizing and documenting recess outcomes, and six community representatives who had participated in recess forums. Legislators were selected to reflect variation in party affiliation and legislative experience, allowing insight into differing approaches to representation. Secretariat officials were included because of their strategic role in mediating between political and administrative processes, while community representatives were chosen to capture citizens' experiences of participation and aspiration articulation. Informants were identified using purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement in recess activities and their capacity to provide rich, contextualized information relevant to the research objectives (Djarmiko et al., 2025; Stanley, 2023).

Interviews were complemented by document analysis to enhance contextual understanding and trace the institutional life of public aspirations. Documents analyzed included recess reports, meeting minutes, internal guidelines, and relevant regional regulations related to legislative functions and development planning. Document analysis was conducted to examine how aspirations were recorded, categorized, and linked to formal planning instruments, providing insight into the bureaucratic filtering process (Bowen, 2009). Data collection was conducted over several months to allow iterative engagement with the field and to refine emerging analytical insights.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach, involving systematic coding and interpretation of interview transcripts and documents. Themes were developed inductively, guided by concepts from political sociology and governance studies, particularly institutional mediation and state–society relations. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation was employed through the comparison of data across sources, actor categories, and methods. Statements from legislators were cross-checked with bureaucratic accounts and documentary evidence, while community narratives were used to validate or challenge institutional perspectives. This triangulation strategy enhances analytical rigor by reducing single-source bias and strengthening interpretive validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Legislative Recess as a Mediated Space between the State and Society

The findings of this study indicate that the legislative recess (*reses*) of the Regional People’s Representative Council (DPRD) in Bali Province functions as a dual arena that is simultaneously symbolic and institutional in nature. For community members, the recess is perceived as a rare and formal opportunity to engage directly with their elected representatives—an interaction that is not consistently available outside the official legislative cycle. Several community informants described the recess as the only space in which they felt they were “heard by the state” in a direct manner, as aspirations could be articulated without passing through layered bureaucratic intermediaries. Within their narratives, the physical presence of DPRD members in communal spaces—such as banjar halls, village meeting rooms, or sub-district offices—was interpreted as a form of symbolic recognition of citizens’ existence and interests. This perception suggests that the meaning of the recess lies not solely in the substantive content of the aspirations conveyed, but also in the embodied presence of the state through its representatives.

From the legislators’ perspective, the recess is understood as a representational obligation imbued with both political and symbolic significance. Several DPRD members interviewed emphasized that the recess serves as a crucial arena for maintaining proximity to constituents and sustaining political legitimacy, particularly amid growing public skepticism toward representative institutions. One legislator (I-LG) reflected that the recess is not merely about “collecting proposals,” but about demonstrating moral commitment as a representative who is present and responsive. This view reveals that the recess operates as a performative practice, in which representation is produced through face-to-face interaction, empathetic discourse, and the symbolism of presence, rather than solely through policy outcomes.

Field observations further reinforce these findings. In several observed recess activities, meeting spaces were arranged in semi-formal settings, often with circular or face-to-face seating arrangements that fostered a dialogical impression, even though the overall flow of events remained controlled by legislators and their supporting teams. Recess banners, party attributes, and systematic photo documentation functioned as symbolic elements

affirming the presence of state institutions. At the same time, discussion periods were frequently limited, and aspirations were delivered sequentially within predetermined formats. This condition illustrates an inherent tension between the appearance of closeness and the institutional boundaries that continue to regulate interaction.

Within the framework of institutional mediation, the legislative recess can be understood as a routine practice that structures state–society relations through a combination of symbols, rules, and power relations. Salomo and Rahmayanti (2023) argue that institutions operate not only through formal design but also through everyday practices imbued with symbolic and political meaning. The findings of this study resonate with this perspective, demonstrating that the recess functions as a mediating mechanism that aligns societal expectations with the institutional capacities and logic of the DPRD. Aspirations articulated during recess forums do not automatically translate into public policy; instead, they are subjected to institutional processes that transform citizens’ positions from active political subjects into administrative inputs.

The varying perceptions of the recess among different actors are summarized in Table 1, which highlights divergent interpretations of its function among community members, legislators, and supporting bureaucratic actors.

Table 1 Actors’ Perceptions of the Function of the DPRD Legislative Recess

Actor	Primary Perception of the Recess	Implications for Mediation
Community members	A formal space to meet representatives and convey aspirations	Reinforcement of the symbolic meaning of representation
Legislators	A representational obligation and arena for political legitimacy	Production of legitimacy and relational proximity
DPRD Secretariat	An institutional activity requiring documentation and administrative order	Filtering and translation of aspirations

Source: Compiled from interview data and field observations, 2025

Interviews with DPRD Secretariat staff reveal that they primarily view the recess as part of an institutional work cycle that must adhere to administrative order and procedural compliance. One secretariat informant (I-SK) emphasized that the success of a recess is often measured by the completeness of reports and conformity with regulations, rather than by the extent to which public aspirations are realized. This perspective underscores that, from its inception, the recess is framed as an institutional process governed by specific standards and constraints. Consequently, the dialogical space that appears open is, in practice, situated within a tightly regulated institutional corridor.

Articulation and Framing of Public Aspirations in Recess Practices

The findings of this study demonstrate that public aspirations articulated during DPRD legislative recess (reses) practices never emerge as fully neutral or spontaneous preferences. Rather, they undergo processes of construction from the very early stages of articulation. Aspirations are shaped through the interaction between the forum’s procedural format, the

facilitation style adopted by legislators, and the level of participants' political literacy. In several observed recess activities, the semi-formal structure of the agenda—typically beginning with a brief presentation by legislators outlining “development priorities” and concluding with a limited question-and-answer session—implicitly framed the types of aspirations considered relevant and legitimate. Consequently, community members tended to adjust the expression of their needs to the language and categories previously introduced by the forum organizers.

Interviews with citizens participating in recess forums revealed that many attendees arrived with relatively general and pragmatic concerns, such as neighborhood infrastructure improvements, social assistance, or support for local economic activities. One community informant (I-MS) explained that they deliberately chose to convey proposals that were “most likely to be accepted,” given the constraints of time and opportunity. This perspective reflects citizens' strategic awareness in participation, whereby aspirations are adapted to institutional expectations in order to increase their chances of being recorded and followed up. In this context, the articulation of aspirations is not merely an expression of needs, but also the outcome of social and political calculations learned through prior experience.

Field observations indicate that this dynamic is further reinforced by the governance of recess forums. In several locations, moderators—whether legislators or supporting staff—actively steered discussions to remain focused on issues that could be translated into local government programs. When participants attempted to raise more structural concerns, such as unequal access to public services or the long-term social and environmental impacts of tourism, responses tended to be normative and redirected toward more concrete and measurable proposals. This condition illustrates how the boundaries of participatory discourse are subtly shaped through facilitation mechanisms.

From the legislators' perspective, technocratic aspirations are perceived as more manageable and easier to advocate within planning and budgeting processes. Several DPRD members (I-LG) emphasized that proposals equipped with clear indicators and aligned with local government program nomenclature are more likely to be incorporated into official documents. This finding suggests that institutional preferences for certain types of aspirations already influence which issues are deemed “appropriate” to be voiced at the outset. Aspirations that are long-term in nature or that address structural roots of problems are often considered too abstract or beyond the DPRD's immediate authority and thus tend to be marginalized.

The role of the DPRD Secretariat in this process is also significant. Interviews with secretariat staff (I-SK) indicate that they actively assist in reformulating aspirations into formats compatible with administrative requirements, such as sectoral classification or alignment with regional development plans. While this process is intended to facilitate follow-up, it simultaneously simplifies and reframes public aspirations. Aspirations that cannot be easily categorized frequently experience a reduction in meaning or are excluded from priority lists altogether.

These findings can be understood through the concept of selective participation and institutional framing in governance studies. Palmer (2017) argues that public participation always unfolds within institutional frameworks that actively determine who can participate, how participation occurs, and which issues are considered legitimate. In DPRD recess practices, such institutional framing is evident in the preference for aspirations compatible with policy logics, while issues that challenge existing structures tend to be reduced. Thus, the recess functions as an initial filtering mechanism that shapes the content of aspirations before they enter subsequent institutional processes.

Differences in the characteristics of articulated aspirations are summarized in Table 2, highlighting the dominance of technocratic aspirations over structural issues.

Table 2 Characteristics of Public Aspirations in DPRD Legislative Recess Practices

Type of Aspiration	Issue Examples	Level of Dominance	Likelihood of Follow-up
Techno-administrative	Neighborhood infrastructure, MSME support, public facilities	High	Relatively high
Socio-structural	Service inequality, tourism impacts, social sustainability	Low	Relatively low

Source: Compiled from interview data and field observations, 2025

Administrative and Political Filtering: From Aspirations to Policy Documents

The findings further reveal that public aspirations expressed during DPRD recess forums do not end with face-to-face interactions between citizens and their representatives. Instead, they enter a prolonged sequence of administrative and political processes. Once the recess forum concludes, aspirations move from the social arena into the institutional domain, where bureaucratic and policy logics prevail. This process involves formal documentation by the DPRD Secretariat, sectoral classification of aspirations, and alignment with regional planning and budgeting documents. It is within these stages that public aspirations undergo layered filtering, significantly affecting their prospects of being transformed into policy.

Interviews with DPRD Secretariat staff indicate that documentation constitutes a critical stage in determining the initial fate of a proposal. Aspirations conveyed orally must be reformulated into written form, often using more technocratic and concise language. One secretariat informant (I-SK) explained that report format limitations require them to condense citizens' narratives into programmatic bullet points. While intended to enhance administrative efficiency, this process indirectly strips away the social context and emotional urgency embedded in the original aspirations. Aspirations no longer appear as lived experiences of citizens, but as administrative items ready for further processing.

The subsequent stage involves grouping aspirations into sectoral categories, such as infrastructure, social affairs, economic development, or the environment. This categorization is intended to align aspirations with the organizational structure of local government agencies and the development planning cycle. However, documentary analysis shows that cross-

sectoral or structurally oriented aspirations are often difficult to place within a single category. As a result, such aspirations tend to be marginalized or merged with other issues deemed more administratively relevant. One legislator (I-LG) acknowledged that not all aspirations can be optimally advocated due to the need to conform to predefined “maps of authority” and budgetary priorities.

The filtering process intensifies when aspirations must be aligned with regional planning and budgeting documents, such as local government work plans and regional budgets. At this stage, public aspirations compete with executive-designed programs and other political interests. Aspirations that do not align with development priorities or exceed fiscal capacity are often excluded without transparent explanations to the public. Several community informants (I-MS) expressed disappointment that proposals they considered important never reappeared in policy deliberations, despite being repeatedly articulated during recess forums.

Analysis of these dynamics suggests that aspiration filtering should not be understood as the failure of individual actors, whether legislators or supporting bureaucrats. Rather, it is a logical consequence of institutional logics operating within local governance systems. Budgetary constraints, fragmented authority, and demands for administrative accountability compel institutions to select among incoming aspirations. Within this framework, the recess functions as an entry point for aspirations, but not as the final determinant of policy outcomes. These institutional logics define the substantive boundaries of democratic mediation.

The concept of institutional translation helps explain how social demands are transformed upon entering policy arenas. Kjellgren and Richter (2021) argue that policy processes inevitably involve translating values, interests, and social experiences into administrative categories manageable by institutions. Such translation is never neutral, as it entails choices regarding what is simplified, emphasized, or omitted. In the context of DPRD recess practices, institutional translation is evident when citizens’ aspirations must conform to performance indicators, program nomenclature, and fiscal constraints. As a result, the substance of aspirations often shifts from demands for structural change to narrower and more measurable program proposals.

This layered filtering process also carries political implications. Legislators occupy a mediating position between citizens’ aspirations and institutional realities, requiring them to negotiate public expectations against implementation feasibility. In this context, political legitimacy is shaped not only by the ability to absorb aspirations, but also by the capacity to explain why certain aspirations cannot be realized. However, the findings indicate that feedback mechanisms to the public remain weak, causing aspiration filtering to be perceived as neglect rather than as a structural consequence of institutional constraints.

The Strategic Role of the DPRD Secretariat in Institutional Mediation

The findings position the DPRD Secretariat as a key actor that has thus far received limited attention in analyses of state–society relations. In the context of legislative recess

(reses) practices in Bali Province, the Secretariat does not merely function as an auxiliary administrative unit; rather, it plays an active role as an institutional mediator that determines how public aspirations are processed, prioritized, and sustained throughout the policy cycle. This role is manifested through routine administrative practices that may appear technical and procedural, yet are in fact imbued with strategic choices carrying significant political implications.

Interviews with DPRD Secretariat staff indicate that they operate at the intersection of legislators' demands, formal regulations, and the bureaucratic realities of local government. One secretariat informant (I-SK) explained that every incoming aspiration must first be interpreted within the framework of prevailing rules and planning documents. This interpretive process is not mechanical; instead, it involves judgments regarding feasibility, relevance, and the likelihood of follow-up. In this sense, the Secretariat actively shapes the final form of aspirations that are subsequently communicated to legislators and relevant local government agencies.

The bureaucratic capacity of the Secretariat emerges as a decisive factor in the quality of institutional mediation. Field findings reveal variations in staff capacity in terms of policy comprehension, regulatory literacy, and inter-institutional communication. Secretariats staffed by more experienced personnel tend to be better equipped to assist legislators in articulating public aspirations strategically, for instance by linking them to regional development priorities or specific performance indicators. Conversely, limited capacity often results in a minimalist administrative approach, in which aspirations are treated merely as reporting obligations without further advocacy. This contrast underscores how bureaucratic competence directly affects the extent to which public aspirations can be meaningfully mediated within institutional processes.

Regulatory interpretation also constitutes a critical arena of secretariat mediation. Regulations governing recess activities, development planning, and budgeting provide formal frameworks that must be observed; however, the findings suggest that these regulations are often open to interpretation. Secretariat staff (I-SK) noted that they must assess the extent to which aspirations can be incorporated into official documents without violating existing provisions. Such interpretation is not purely technical but also political, as it determines the scope of legislators' maneuverability in advocating for their constituents' demands. In this regard, the Secretariat functions as an institutional gatekeeper that delineates the boundary between what is possible and what is not within the policy process.

Working relationships between the Secretariat and legislators further highlight the strategic position of this supporting bureaucracy. Interview data indicate that the quality of communication and mutual trust between these actors significantly influences the effectiveness of aspiration mediation. Legislators who maintain strong working relationships with the Secretariat tend to receive more proactive administrative support, including assistance in policy argumentation and coordination with local government agencies. In contrast, distant and purely formal relationships confine the Secretariat's role to basic

administrative functions. This condition illustrates how personal and institutional relations shape the outcomes of democratic representation.

Field observations provide concrete illustrations of how the Secretariat's role unfolds after recess forums conclude. Within secretariat offices, public aspirations are processed through internal meetings, report drafting, and cross-sectoral coordination. Although these processes occur largely outside public view, it is precisely here that the trajectory and fate of aspirations are determined. Some aspirations are preserved through efforts to synchronize them with local government agendas, while others disappear after being deemed incompatible with existing policy frameworks. These practices demonstrate that institutional mediation does not end with legislators, but continues—and is often reinforced—by the supporting bureaucracy.

This analysis aligns with contemporary literature on bureaucratic agency in governance, which emphasizes that bureaucracies are neither neutral nor passive actors, but possess the capacity to shape policy outcomes and patterns of representation (Dore, 2023; Jan et al., 2021). From this perspective, the DPRD Secretariat can be understood as a political actor in practice, despite lacking electoral legitimacy. Through its control over procedures, regulatory interpretation, and information flows, the Secretariat actively shapes state–society relations and determines the extent to which public aspirations can be transformed into policy.

Participatory Inequalities and the Limits of Democratic Mediation

The findings on DPRD recess practices reveal that public participation within these forums is far from egalitarian, despite their formal design as open spaces for all citizens. Budgetary constraints, limited duration, and facilitation capacity constitute initial factors shaping who is able to attend and participate actively. In many cases, recess activities are conducted within short timeframes and across wide electoral areas, preventing equal access for all social groups. This condition indicates that access to democratic participatory spaces is filtered from the outset by structural factors beyond individual citizens' control.

Interviews with citizens and recess organizers suggest that individuals with closer social or political ties to legislators are more likely to receive information and invitations to attend. Community informants (I-MS) described participation in recess forums as often dependent on informal networks, such as relationships with neighborhood leaders, local organization figures, or legislators' support teams. Conversely, socially marginalized groups—including individuals with lower levels of education, informal sector workers, and residents of geographically remote areas—are more frequently excluded or present only as passive listeners. Participation in recess forums, therefore, is shaped not merely by individual willingness, but by social position and access to relational resources.

Political literacy also emerges as a significant factor reinforcing participatory inequality. Interview findings indicate that participants with prior organizational experience or a stronger understanding of governmental mechanisms tend to be more confident in articulating their aspirations. They are able to frame demands using language deemed

“appropriate” by legislators and bureaucrats, thereby increasing the likelihood of accommodation. In contrast, citizens with limited political literacy often express concerns in generalized or personal terms, which receive less attention during follow-up processes. One legislator informant (I-LG) implicitly acknowledged that aspirations articulated in programmatic language are easier to record and advocate for than emotionally charged or unstructured complaints.

Field observations during recess implementation further corroborate these findings. In observed forums, interactions were dominated by a small number of participants accustomed to speaking in public settings. These individuals occupied a disproportionate share of discussion time, while others remained silent or merely nodded in agreement. Spatial arrangements and event formats—with legislators seated at the front and participants positioned as an audience—symbolically reinforced participatory hierarchies. Although question-and-answer sessions were formally open, time constraints meant that only a limited number of aspirations could be voiced, typically by the most prepared and vocal actors.

Participatory inequality is also closely linked to the state’s limited resources for organizing more inclusive recess activities. Budget constraints restrict the number of recess locations and the quality of facilitation, while the workload of legislators and secretariat staff limits opportunities for more intensive participatory accompaniment. Under these conditions, the recess tends to function as a forum of symbolic representation rather than as a genuinely deliberative and egalitarian space. The aspirations articulated thus reflect the voices of those who are present and able to speak, rather than the full spectrum of interests within the electoral district.

This analysis reinforces the concept of the structural constraints of participation, which posits that democratic participation is always shaped by the distribution of resources, power, and social positions among actors (Lim et al., 2021; Zulkarnaini et al., 2023). Participation does not occur in a vacuum, but is embedded within pre-existing economic, social, and cultural inequalities. In the context of DPRD recess practices, these structures manifest in unequal access, differential articulatory capacity, and selective institutional recognition of public aspirations.

These findings illuminate the limits of democratic mediation exercised through legislative recesses. While the recess serves as a formal bridge between the state and society, it does not fully overcome structurally embedded participatory inequalities. The theoretical implication is the need to conceptualize the recess not merely as a participatory mechanism, but as an arena in which social inequalities are simultaneously reproduced and negotiated. Practically, these findings underscore the importance of participation designs that are more sensitive to vulnerable groups, including efforts to enhance political literacy, expand the reach of forums, and strengthen facilitation roles. Without such measures, recess practices risk amplifying the voices of already empowered groups while leaving others at the margins of democratic processes.

Recess between Symbolic Representation and Substantive Mediation

Overall, the findings of this study position the DPRD legislative recess (reses) in an ambivalent space between symbolic political representation and substantive mediation between the state and society. On the one hand, the recess appears as a visible and publicly recognizable democratic practice, imbued with strong symbolic meanings of state presence within citizens' everyday lives. The physical presence of legislators in their electoral districts, face-to-face encounters, and the ritualized articulation of aspirations collectively create the impression that representative relations are functioning as intended. On the other hand, the effectiveness of the recess as an instrument for transforming public aspirations into concrete policy outcomes is shown to be highly dependent on the strength and capacity of the institutional arrangements that support it, particularly beyond the moment of interaction itself.

Empirically, this study demonstrates that the symbolic function of the recess often outweighs its substantive role. For many citizens, the recess is understood as evidence that their voices have been "heard," regardless of whether their aspirations are ultimately incorporated into policy. This perception illustrates how representative legitimacy is constructed not solely through policy outputs, but also through symbolic and experiential dimensions of direct interaction. In this context, legislators act not only as carriers of political mandates, but also as figures who perform representation before their constituents. This performative dimension helps explain why the recess continues to be perceived as meaningful, even when the realization of aspirations remains limited.

Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that when the recess is understood beyond its symbolic value, its capacity as a mechanism of substantive mediation is determined largely by institutional processes that unfold after the forum concludes. Public aspirations must be translated, filtered, and aligned with administrative logics and local development planning frameworks. It is at this juncture that the gap between symbolic representation and substantive mediation becomes apparent. Many aspirations lose their transformative potential not due to a lack of political will on the part of individual legislators, but because of structural and institutional constraints that shape policy processes. In this sense, the limitations of the recess are not primarily actor-driven, but institutionally configured.

This interpretation aligns with contemporary debates on the quality of representative democracy at the subnational level, which emphasize that representation cannot be reduced to electoral mechanisms or formal participatory forums alone. Salomo and Rahmayanti (2023) argue that everyday democratic practices—including administrative routines and informal interactions—play a crucial role in shaping state–society relations. In the context of DPRD recess practices, the quality of democratic mediation is determined precisely by actors and processes that often operate behind the scenes, such as supporting bureaucracies, procedural rules, and institutional capacities for managing public aspirations.

Furthermore, the findings reinforce the argument advanced by Cid and Lerner (2023) regarding institutional translation, whereby social demands undergo transformations in

meaning as they enter the domain of public policy. This translation process is inherently non-neutral, as it is shaped by political, administrative, and technocratic considerations. Consequently, aspirations that initially reflect citizens' lived experiences may be converted into fragmented programmatic proposals detached from their original social contexts. Under such conditions, the recess functions as a symbolic gateway into the policy system, but does not necessarily guarantee the emergence of substantive and responsive policy outcomes.

By situating the recess between symbolic representation and substantive mediation, this article underscores the importance of extending analyses of political representation into the realm of everyday administrative and institutional practices. Representation does not occur solely when legislators meet their constituents, but also when aspirations are recorded, classified, negotiated, and decided upon within bureaucratic arenas. This perspective challenges overly optimistic normative views of formal participation, while opening space for a more realistic understanding of how representative democracy operates at the local level.

Analytically, this synthesis suggests that strengthening the substantive function of the recess cannot be achieved merely by increasing the frequency of meetings or expanding participation in quantitative terms. More fundamentally, it requires enhancing institutional capacity, clarifying follow-up mechanisms, and fostering tighter integration between representational practices and policy planning processes. Without such reforms, the recess will continue to occupy an ambiguous position: symbolically significant, yet substantively constrained.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that DPRD legislative recess activities at the subnational level cannot be understood merely as formal procedures for absorbing public aspirations, but rather as institutional mediation mechanisms that actively shape relations between the state and society. By taking the DPRD of Bali Province as its empirical locus, the article fulfills its research objectives by showing that the effectiveness of the recess as a democratic bridge is largely determined by processes of articulation, framing, and translation of public aspirations within complex institutional structures. The recess is shown to perform a dual function: symbolically, it produces and sustains the legitimacy of political representation through the presence and direct interaction of representatives with citizens; substantively, its capacity to transform aspirations into policy outcomes depends on administrative logics, budgetary constraints, and the strategic role of supporting bureaucracies—particularly the DPRD Secretariat. The study establishes its conceptual and empirical novelty by positioning the recess as a non-neutral mediating practice shaped by power relations, institutional capacity, and participatory inequalities. These findings contribute to political sociology and governance studies by demonstrating that the quality of representative democracy at the subnational level is determined not only by electoral mechanisms or formal participatory forums, but also by everyday administrative practices that quietly determine whether public aspirations remain symbolic expressions of participation or become integral components of the policy

process.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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