# Challenges to the Concept of Deliberative Policy in the Era of Society 5.0

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## Abstract

This article examines the development of the deliberative policy concept within the Indonesian context as the country undergoes transformation in response to the dynamics of the Society 5.0 era. The shift in public policymaking from hierarchical (top-down) models toward more participatory mechanisms constitutes a central issue of analysis. The growing demand for broader public engagement underscores the importance of formulating policy designs that are inclusive, adaptive, and responsive to social and technological change. Employing a literature review approach, this study explores how the integration of digital technologies with deliberative practices can enhance the quality of public policy processes. The analysis highlights that deliberative policy provides more open spaces for public participation while simultaneously offering opportunities to optimize the use of technology in decision-making processes. The findings indicate the urgency of developing strategies that are not solely oriented toward policy outputs but also aim to strengthen governmental institutional capacity and societal support. Indonesia's adaptation to Society 5.0 therefore requires not only technological modernization but also a reconstruction of governance that positions public deliberation as a key instrument in realizing more democratic, inclusive, and sustainable governance.

## Keywords:

deliberative, participatory, public policy, society 5.0

## Introduction

Contemporary direct democracy in Indonesia carries significant implications for the process of public policy formulation. Through mechanisms of direct democracy, citizens are not only involved in selecting political leaders but also participate in policy formulation processes. Such forms of public participation can be observed in community forums, meetings between policymakers and interest groups, as well as formal arenas such as development planning deliberations. From the perspective of citizens as service recipients, the expression of democracy in public policy is also reflected in the use of digital technologies and social media as platforms for articulating public aspirations (Bishop & Davis, 2002). During the 2019–2024 period (see Figures 1 and 2), the quality of democracy in Indonesia exhibited a notable decline. This condition has not only resulted in reduced civil liberties and weakened pluralism but has also affected the overall functioning of government institutions (Jati, 2021). Based on a 2019 survey evaluating the leadership of President Joko Widodo, there was a marked increase in public fear of engaging in organizational activities, rising from 10% in 2014 to 21%. A similar trend was observed in the indicator of religious freedom, where perceived restrictions increased from 7% in 2014 to 13% (LSI, 2019).

The consequences that arise when democracy is extended from the political sphere to the policy domain are multifaceted. First, public democracy creates arenas of contestation among both citizens and elites, often giving rise to forms of protest such as petitions, demonstrations, or policy boycotts (Abels, 2007). This phenomenon is closely linked to the challenges of social control: while governments govern through regulatory instruments, society emphasizes moral and ethical standards that are frequently ambiguous. Second, issues of data contestation emerge in public policymaking. Although democratic openness is believed to foster more participatory, accountable, and adaptive policies, in practice, policy decisions are often driven more by political considerations than by empirical evidence. Jacobs (2014) argues that this condition generates a public value dilemma, as policy processes tend to become arenas of political contestation rather than being grounded in substantive problem-solving.
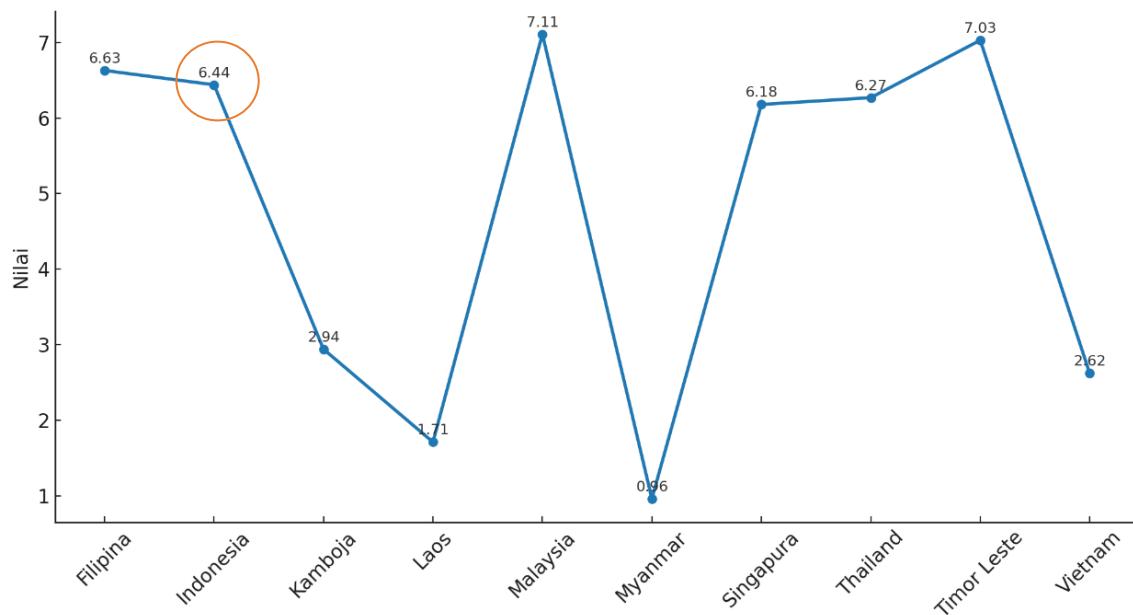


**Figure 1.** Democracy Index in ASEAN Countries
Source: *Economist Intelligence Unit* (2025)
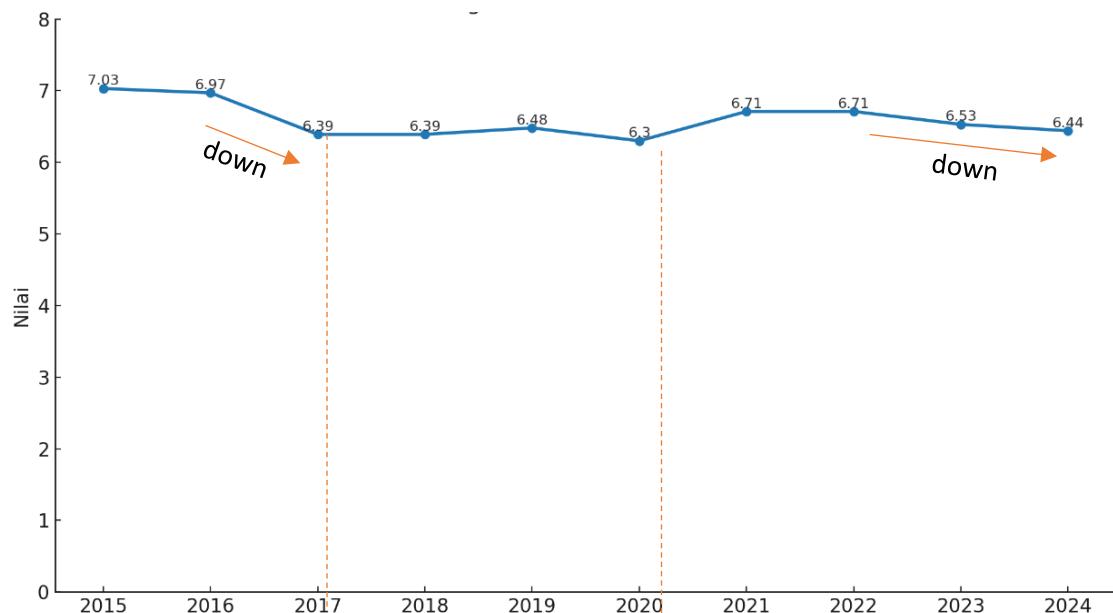


**Figure 2.** Trends in Indonesia's Democracy Index
Source: *Economist Intelligence Unit*, 2025

Since its initial introduction, the concept of deliberative policy has been considered well suited to the Indonesian context, particularly as it aligns with the spirit of decentralization and the communal characteristics of Indonesian society (FB, 2004a). Within the field of public administration, the emergence of this concept is closely associated with a shift in orientation from *government* to *governance*, as well as the incorporation of deliberative democracy into policy processes. The governance perspective views public administration not merely as a governmental institution, but as encompassing a range of organizations that place the public interest as their primary objective. These organizations operate to address shared problems and to achieve public purposes. Accordingly, the meaning of "public" in public administration is not understood solely in institutional terms, but rather in terms of orientation and values that emphasize *publicness* (Pesch, 2008). Within this framework, public administration becomes more dynamic and increasingly relevant for explaining the growing complexity of public issues, which are multilayered and not easily governed through institutional arrangements alone (Junaidi, 2015).

Public policy is regarded as both the output and the core of the discipline of public administration (Denhardt, 1995). Although the development of public administration as a policy science has been widely welcomed by scholars and practitioners alike, and has even enabled the rearticulation of theories and approaches to better align with the dynamics of the public sector, a range of critiques and challenges have recently emerged regarding its position as a policy discipline. As a field of public policy, public administration continues to place government bureaucracy as the primary institution. Bureaucracy is viewed as the central actor in the policy formulation process, even though this paradigm has shifted the focus of public administration studies from bureaucracy per se toward issues of public interests and public affairs. Nevertheless, government remains the sole institution formally authorized to make policy decisions. The evolution of democratic governance requires governments to diversify their approaches to policymaking. Empirical realities indicate that policy formulation increasingly demands the involvement of non-state actors. High expectations regarding the quality of public policy signal the need for broader engagement beyond the executive and legislative branches, given that these actors often possess valuable information, experience, and tacit knowledge. The participation of competent multi-stakeholders in policy processes is therefore believed to enhance the rationality of decision-making (Weiss, 2000), a proposition that is also consistent with the notion of the wisdom of crowds (Surowiecki, 2004).

These changes expand the policy arena, allowing the involvement of multiple actors with diverse interests and complex strategies (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000). In contexts where the state is no longer the sole agent of policy formulation and implementation, the steering function over interactions among actors becomes critical. The concept of *governance without government* (Rosenau & Czempiel, 1992) captures this new reality, marked by an expansion of authority alongside the limited capacity of the state. The Society 5.0 era further reinforces the urgency of this shift. Top-down policy models have proven insufficient in addressing the complexity of social problems, prompting the use of digital technologies that increasingly emphasize publicness in decision-making processes. Within this context, the notion of *governance bodies* has emerged, referring to non-governmental institutions mandated by the state to formulate policies in specific sectors. Their membership reflects the pillars of modern governance: government, civil society, and the business sector. This concept challenges traditional public policy theories that position the executive and legislative branches as the sole holders of authority, as in practice the state may delegate its powers to non-state institutions. From a governance perspective, public administration is understood as a process involving the exercise of administrative, political, and economic power in responding to public issues

(Dwiyanto, 2004). Consequently, the study of public administration is no longer confined to governmental institutions, but also encompasses market mechanisms and civil society organizations, insofar as these entities are oriented toward public affairs and public interests.

Traditional views that position the state or government as the sole actor in the public policy process are no longer relevant, either in the context of Indonesia's ongoing democratization or within the dynamics of the Society 5.0 era. When political representation frequently experiences distortion, the involvement of stakeholder groups becomes an urgent necessity in policy formulation processes. Broader participation not only enriches public policy processes but also promotes the development of more responsive and accountable policies. Under these conditions, governments need to legitimately open spaces for the involvement of actors and institutions beyond the bureaucracy, including *governance bodies*, which can be regarded as key actors in the contemporary public policy landscape. Their presence further underscores the need to renew academic perspectives in policy studies to align with the demands of governance innovation in the Society 5.0 era.

**Method**

This article employs a library research approach for data collection. This method is commonly used to obtain analytical information from various literature sources, including books, journals, and scholarly articles (Zed, 2008). Conceptually, library research is understood as a research activity conducted through the systematic collection of information and data from diverse bibliographic materials, whether available in libraries or accessed via the internet, as long as they are relevant to the issues under investigation (Assyakurrohim et al., 2022).

The research process was carried out in a systematic manner, beginning with data collection and processing and culminating in the drawing of conclusions, by applying specific methods and techniques to address the research questions (see Figure 3). In the context of writing this article, data obtained from various literature sources were subsequently analyzed using content analysis techniques, enabling a more in-depth understanding of the issues discussed.

The database used in this article consists of national and international journals published between 2020 and 2025. The literature search was conducted using the keyword *deliberative policy*, after which the retrieved publications were analyzed and mapped using the VOSviewer application to identify research trends, conceptual linkages, and relevant author networks. The mapping results indicate that *deliberative policy* is closely connected to several key themes, namely *policy*, *debate*, *deliberative process*, *legitimacy*, *communication*, and *society* (see Figure 4).
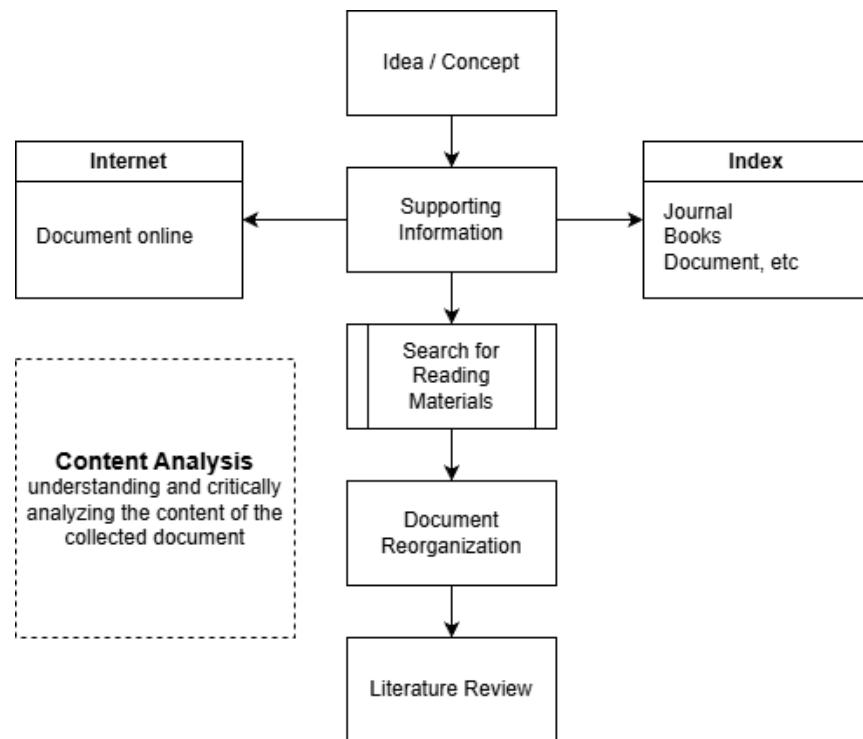
**Figure 3**. Stages of the Library Research Method
Source: Zed, 2008
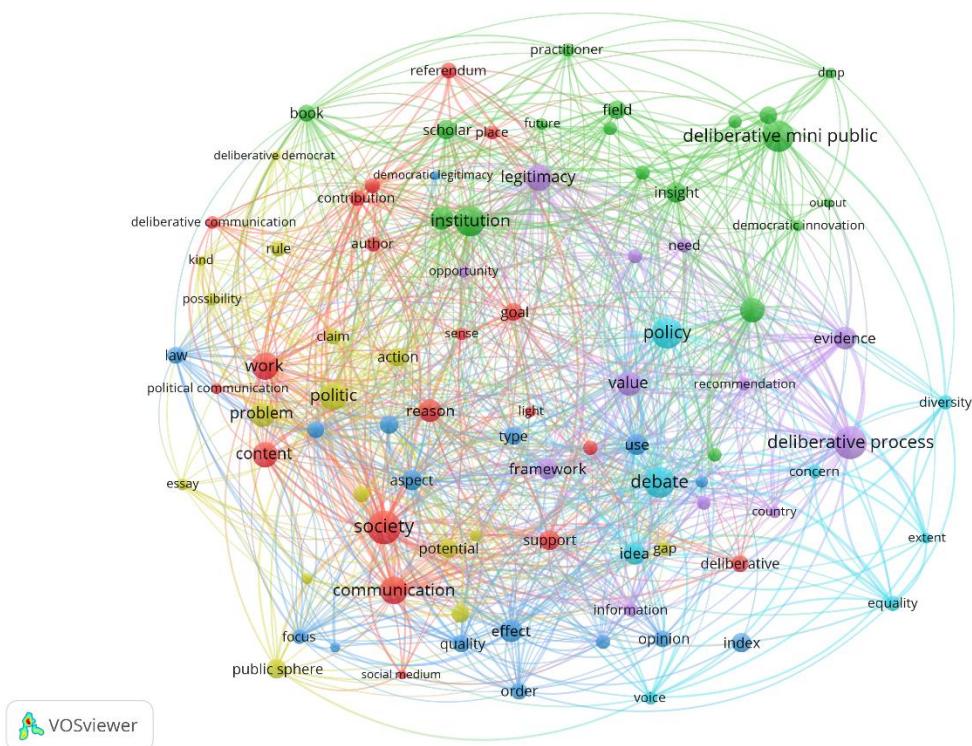


**Figure 4.** Network Visualization of Deliberative Policy
Source: Literature Review Crossef, 2025

**Results and Discussion**

The concept of deliberative democracy is rooted in the notion of the public sphere (Habermas, 2006). This form of democracy emphasizes decision-making processes based on deliberation, dialogue, and the exchange of experiences among citizens and stakeholders. Its primary objective is to achieve consensus through discussions that take into account diverse perspectives. Accordingly, citizen engagement constitutes the core of deliberative democracy. This model differs from representative democracy, which places greater emphasis on political representation, formal electoral mechanisms, and majority–minority logic. Whereas representative democracy is commonly associated with political competition, winners, and losers, deliberative democracy prioritizes reasoned argumentation, dialogue, mutual respect among ideas, and the pursuit of consensus. Similarly, while direct democracy relies heavily on elections and the role of political elites, deliberative democracy gives precedence to the active participation of citizens in decision-making processes.

This idea is also influenced by communitarian thought. Pierre and Peters (2000) argue that deliberative democracy can be understood as part of a communitarian framework, particularly because it locates decision-making authority at levels closer to the community. At its core, the practice involves the direct engagement of the public through debate and open dialogue, distinguishing it from representative democracy, where public involvement is largely confined to elections, and from forms of direct democracy that offer limited opportunities for collective deliberation on substantive issues.

Furthermore, deliberative democracy in relation to deliberative public policy is understood as a process of public consultation conducted prior to policy decision-making. The term *deliberation* itself originates from the Latin *deliberatio*, meaning consultation or collective discussion (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2000). Within this framework, public policy is considered deliberative when it is formulated through public discourse as a means of testing reasons and arguments. The ultimate objective is to broaden citizen participation in the formation of aspirations and opinions so that the resulting policies and regulations are more closely aligned with societal needs (Hardiman, 2004b).

To identify a process as deliberative democracy, Carson and Karp (in Gastil & Levine, 2005) propose three criteria: *influence* (the capacity to affect policy outcomes), *inclusion* (the inclusiveness and representation of diverse viewpoints), and *deliberation* (the availability of open dialogue, access to information, respect for arguments, and an orientation toward consensus). These three criteria can serve as analytical instruments for assessing the extent to which a decision-making process adheres to deliberative principles. Fishkin (2009) further adds five conditions for evaluating the quality of deliberation: access to accurate information, substantive balance among arguments, representation of diverse public positions, sincerity in considering arguments, and equality in evaluating all viewpoints regardless of who presents them.

**Challenges of Deliberative Policy**

The enactment of Law No. 14 of 2008 on Public Information Disclosure has in fact created opportunities for fulfilling one of the key prerequisites for the implementation of deliberative policy. Nevertheless, many other required conditions remain far from being met. Policy formulation practices at the local level have often failed to reflect the principle of openness. Even Regional Budget (APBD) documents, which are legally enacted as Regional Regulations and formally classified as public documents, are still frequently treated as confidential (Indonesia Corruption Watch, 2007). Experiences of public participation implemented across various regions also indicate that transformative and empowering impacts have not yet been optimally achieved. This condition is reflected in the scores of the Public Information Disclosure Index (IKIP) over the 2022–2025 period, based on 20 assessment indicators (see Figure 5 and Table 1).
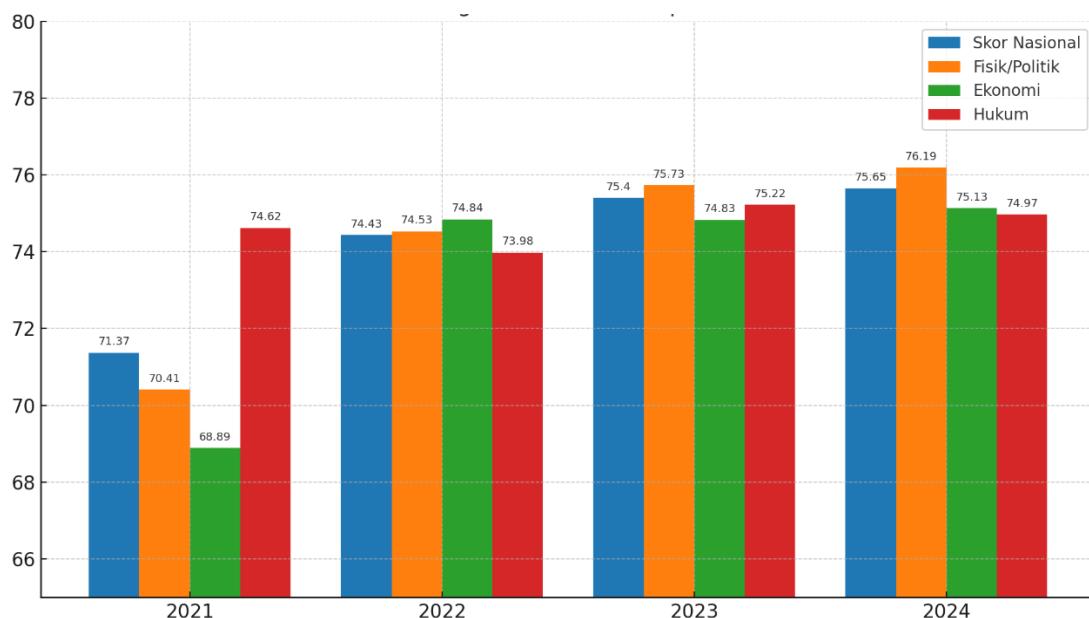


**Figure 5**. Public Information Disclosure Index by Dimension
Source: *Komisi Informasi Pusat*, 2024

**Table 1.** IKIP Results Based on 20 Indicators

| No | Indicator | 2023 | 2024 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Freedom to Seek Information without Fear | 78.94 | 79.38 |
| 2 | Access to and Dissemination of Information | 76.69 | 77.48 |
| 3 | Availability of Accurate, Reliable, and Up-to-Date Information | 75.99 | 75.62 |
| 4 | Public Participation | 74.66 | 75.68 |
| 5 | Public Literacy on the Right to Information Disclosure | 72.02 | 73.22 |
| 6 | Proportionality of Limitations on Information Disclosure | 76.06 | 75.74 |
| 7 | Low Cost of Obtaining Information | 79.61 | 80.41 |
| 8 | Public Information Governance | 76.56 | 76.25 |
| 9 | Budgetary Support for Information Management | 69.12 | 69.37 |
| 10 | Utilization of Public Information | 76.87 | 76.46 |
| 11 | Diversity of Media Ownership | 75.07 | 75.66 |
| 12 | Media Bias in Information Disclosure | 76.28 | 75.61 |
| 13 | Transparency | 70.3 | 72.18 |
| 14 | Legal Guarantees for Access to Information | 79.79 | 79.92 |
| 15 | Freedom to Disseminate Information | 79.09 | 77.23 |
| 16 | Protection for Information Requesters | 78.54 | 77.45 |
| 17 | Freedom from Abuse of Information | 72.11 | 70.95 |
| 18 | Legal Protection for Whistleblowers | 64.32 | 65.88 |
| 19 | Compliance with the Freedom of Information Law | 76.36 | 76.33 |
| 20 | Availability of Information Dispute Resolution | 76.31 | 77.00 |

Source: *Komisi Informasi Pusat*, 2024

Several fundamental issues can be identified. First, the gap between political will and government officials' understanding of the importance of participation has resulted in many public forums being conducted merely as formalities, with declining quality over time (Usman, 2001). Second, regulations governing participation in local governance are considered weakly binding, provide insufficient incentives, and are not accompanied by rigorous oversight and law enforcement, either by central or local governments. Third, citizen forums and multi-stakeholder platforms that have the potential to serve as channels of public representation often fail to develop into democratic and sustainable institutions, primarily due to limitations in leadership, transparency, competence, and access to resources. Fourth, planners, implementers, and facilitators of participatory programs face methodological challenges, particularly in designing effective participatory forums and preventing the domination of certain groups. The lack of innovation and limited development of technical skills in organizing deliberative forums have led to stagnant participatory processes, and in some cases, even to involution. Although civil society activists have successfully advocated for the inclusion of public participation provisions in Law No. 10 of 2004 on the Formation of Laws and Regulations, later reinforced by Law No. 32 of 2004 on Regional Government, their implementation at the local level remains far from satisfactory.

On the other hand, Law No. 25 of 2004 on the National Development Planning System, along with its implementing regulations, has in fact provided a more

deliberative space at the planning stage. However, the primary challenge lies in the weak integration between planning and budgeting processes. While transparency is relatively well maintained during the planning phase, it tends to diminish once the process enters the budgeting stage. This situation underscores the need to strengthen civil society capacity. Public distrust toward government can only be reduced through consistent deliberative practices that are conducted in an accountable and transparent manner. Accordingly, through deliberative policy processes, public trust can be gradually and transformatively restored.

Habermas provides a theoretical foundation for a planning paradigm that emphasizes the necessity of broad public involvement. This perspective underscores the importance of sharing information with the public, building consensus through public dialogue rather than through the domination of power, and rejecting the privileging of experts or bureaucrats. Accordingly, the technocratic model is replaced by a more participatory, reflective planner model (Bolton, 2005). Within this framework, freedom is understood as the capacity of individuals and groups to express themselves while actively participating in public life. Meanwhile, a critical perspective implies responsibility and equality in ensuring that every public decision-making process takes into account all existing interests (Zamzami et al., 2023). Furthermore, Habermas emphasizes that communication constitutes a fundamental human instrument in collective life. The implementation of democracy, therefore, can be understood as a radicalization of communicative structures that have long existed and continue to persist within modern constitutional states. Consequently, deliberative democracy is viewed as an inevitability that must be achieved by states that consistently actualize communicative principles in their systems of public governance (Hardiman, 2009).

## The Society 5.0 Concept in Supporting the Realization of Deliberative Policy

The rapid advancement of the digital era and technological development has facilitated greater access to information in public policymaking processes, a trend that is further reinforced within the Society 5.0 framework. This concept emphasizes the close interconnection between transparency, accountability, and participation. Public participation cannot be realized without transparency, as transparency serves as the foundation for accountability. Conversely, accountability is difficult to achieve if citizens are not involved in monitoring and decision-making processes. Denhardt and Denhardt (2007) further assert that a fundamental prerequisite for citizen engagement in local governance is not only the availability of accurate information, but also sufficient knowledge that enables citizens to participate in a meaningful manner.

In line with this principle, Farazmand (2004) emphasizes the importance of building partnerships as the core of sound governance. According to him, effective partnerships can only be sustained when supported by transparency, as mutual trust among actors in governance processes cannot emerge without openness. Transparency thus becomes a fundamental condition for sustaining participation, accountability, and the effectiveness of governance oriented toward the public interest. In this context,

Dwiyanto (2004) asserts that the challenge in realizing good governance as the foundation of deliberative policy lies in ensuring that public policy formulation is genuinely grounded in practices that are transparent, accountable, equitable, and responsive to societal change. Society 5.0 not only offers accelerated technological advancement but also demands a transformation of governance that opens broader and more deliberative spaces for public participation (Topçuoğlu et al., 2024).

**Conclusion**

Deliberative democracy is a concept in political theory that emphasizes the direct and active involvement of citizens in decision-making processes. Rooted in the notion of the public sphere within Habermas's theory of communication, this approach positions dialogue, deliberation, and the exchange of experiences as key mechanisms for achieving consensus. This model distinguishes itself from representative democracy, which focuses on electoral mechanisms and political representation, as well as from direct democracy, which prioritizes voting without substantive deliberation. Deliberative democracy, by contrast, promotes meaningful interaction among citizens by emphasizing cooperation, respect for differences, and the pursuit of consensus.

Based on the literature analysis conducted, several important conclusions can be drawn. First, deliberative public policy holds high relevance for Indonesia in the era of decentralization, given the communal characteristics of society alongside the persistently high level of public distrust toward governmental administrative practices. Second, the emergence of the concept of deliberative public policy is closely associated with a shift in the orientation of public administration from *government* to *governance*, and it represents a derivative of deliberative democratic practices within the policy domain. Third, although deliberative policy practices have gained normative foundations through a number of national policies, weak coherence with other policy frameworks has hindered their optimal implementation. This condition constitutes a major challenge in strengthening the implementation of deliberative policy in Indonesia.

**Acknowledgment**

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