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Social Movements as a Mechanism for Controlling State Power

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ABSTRACT

Social movements are a form of public participation through which citizens monitor and constrain state power beyond electoral political mechanisms. This study aims to analyse how and under what conditions social movements function as a mechanism for controlling state power and promoting accountability. It adopts a *Narrative Literature Review* approach by examining nine scholarly articles retrieved from Google Scholar and GARUDA. The literature is analysed thematically by identifying patterns in the relationships between public mobilisation, social control mechanisms, state responses, and the factors influencing the effectiveness of social movements. The findings indicate that social movements perform a control function through demonstrations, advocacy, community organising, and public opinion pressure. However, their effectiveness is influenced by organisational capacity, independence, legitimacy, supporting networks, and the availability of political opportunities. Large-scale mobilisation does not necessarily lead to policy changes or substantive accountability, as obstacles such as elite domination and low government responsiveness remain. Therefore, social movements have the potential to strengthen accountability and democracy when supported by strong organisations, solid networks, and an open political environment.

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INTRODUCTION

The state has the authority to regulate social life, formulate public policies, manage resources, and maintain public order and the common good (Hertanto et al., 2026). However, such authority also carries the potential for abuse when it is not accompanied by adequate mechanisms of oversight and accountability (Sahetapy et al., 2025; Hidayatullah et al., 2026). In a democratic system, oversight of state power is exercised not only through formal institutions, such as parliament, the judiciary, and general elections, but also through public participation (Mutmainnah & Maulia, 2024).

One form of such participation is manifested through social movements. Social movements are collective actions built upon networks, solidarity, and shared interests to pursue social or political change (Hasna, 2022; Nofrima & Qodir, 2021). Tilly (1978) explains that social movements develop through processes of mobilisation and interaction between societal groups and those who hold power. Meanwhile, McAdam et al. (2001) situate social movements within broader political dynamics involving contestation, interaction, and changing relations between state and societal actors. Thus, social movements are not merely expressions of public dissatisfaction; they can also serve as a means through which citizens monitor and influence the exercise of state power.

In practice, the existence of democratic institutions does not always guarantee that state power is exercised accountably and responsively. Decision-making processes are sometimes dominated by elite interests, while the aspirations of certain societal groups are not adequately accommodated within formal political processes (Mahendra, 2026). Such conditions encourage citizens to pursue channels of participation beyond electoral mechanisms, including demonstrations, policy advocacy, public campaigns, community organising, and digitally based movements (Erfain, 2025; Wulandari, 2025).

In this context, Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2006) introduced the concept of *social accountability* to explain how civil society and citizens can promote accountability among state institutions through various forms of social and political action. Fox (2015) also emphasises the importance of the relationship between public oversight, organisational capacity, and the responsiveness of the institutions being monitored. This perspective suggests that social movements have the potential to function as mechanisms for controlling state power. However, their effectiveness is determined not only by society's ability to exert pressure but also by the willingness of state institutions to respond to public demands.

Several recent studies illustrate how social movements perform oversight and advocacy functions in relation to the state. Yudistira and Husodo (2022), for example, examine the Kamisan Action in Jakarta as a movement that preserves public memory and voices demands for justice on behalf of victims of human rights violations. Their study demonstrates that the continuity of such actions can keep issues of injustice in the public sphere, even though demands directed at the government do not always receive an adequate response. Meanwhile, Sahid (2022) highlights the importance of healthy, independent, and accountable civil society organisations in ensuring that they can credibly perform their function of controlling state power.

Ekayanta (2022) demonstrates that elite dominance within the formal political arena can restrict the inclusion of agendas concerning agrarian reform, food sovereignty, and redistribution advocated by grassroots groups. Addressing a different issue, Syahwal (2024) finds that social movements advocating legislative changes in the labour sector have not fully succeeded in influencing the law-making process. These findings indicate that the presence of social movements does not necessarily lead to policy changes, particularly when public demands confront stronger political and institutional interests.

A similar phenomenon is evident in the study by Muliono and Nasuhaidi (2024), which examines youth protest movements against political dynasties during the 2024 electoral democratic process. Student mobilisation and the use of social media successfully expanded the reach of public criticism but were insufficient to transform the political structures targeted by the protests. On the other hand, Taqwadin et al. (2025) demonstrate that social movement advocacy for transitional justice in Aceh is influenced by the openness of the political system, the dynamics of elite relations, and the presence of political and social allies. Support from various civil society actors, along with connections to certain political elites, helped create opportunities for the establishment of the Aceh Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Nevertheless, this achievement did not resolve all the justice-related demands of conflict victims.

Khusniah (2024) also positions social movements as one of the forces within civil society that contribute to democratic transition and the strengthening of human rights protection in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Barlian et al. (2026) analyse demonstrations as a form of civil society political action through which state legitimacy is questioned when formal channels of representation are perceived as inadequate for accommodating public aspirations. These studies demonstrate that social movements can perform a control function through mobilisation, advocacy, public opinion formation, and pressure on state institutions. Nevertheless, their outcomes are strongly influenced by the political context, movement capacity, and government responses to public demands.

Although previous studies have examined social movements from various perspectives, they tend to focus on particular cases, issues, or mechanisms. Some studies emphasise protest mobilisation, human rights advocacy, civil society participation, policy contestation, and political opportunities. Each provides important insights into the relationship between social movements and state power. However, a synthesis that connects these findings within a framework of social movements as mechanisms for controlling state power remains necessary (Tarrow, 2011).

Another issue is that not all studies comprehensively explain why some social movements succeed in prompting institutional responses or changes, whereas others merely sustain public criticism or are even ignored by those in power. Therefore, the central concern is not simply whether social movements can influence the state, but also how these control mechanisms operate, which conditions determine their effectiveness, and what factors constrain the achievements of social movements.

Against this background, this study aims to analyse how and under what conditions social movements function as mechanisms for controlling state power in promoting accountability and constraining the abuse of power. The analysis focuses on the relationship between social movements

and state power, the forms of control mechanisms employed, state responses to public demands, and the factors influencing the effectiveness and limitations of social movements.

Theoretically, this study is expected to contribute to the social movement literature by connecting the perspectives of collective mobilisation and social accountability to explain society's role in controlling state power. The novelty of this study lies in its effort to develop a conceptual synthesis that views social movements not merely as forms of mobilisation or resistance, but also as control mechanisms involving organisational capacity, political opportunities, solidarity networks, institutional responses, and the potential for policy change. In practical terms, the findings are expected to provide insights into the importance of public participation, the independence of civil society organisations, and the responsiveness of state institutions in strengthening democratic governance.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a *Narrative Literature Review* approach to examine and synthesise existing research on social movements as mechanisms for controlling state power. This approach was selected because it enables the researchers to identify the development of scholarly perspectives, compare research findings, and develop a conceptual understanding based on various relevant viewpoints. Unlike systematic reviews, which emphasise more rigorous and comprehensive search and selection procedures, narrative reviews provide greater flexibility for critically examining the literature and connecting findings across different research contexts (Snyder, 2019).

The literature search was conducted using two databases: Google Scholar and GARUDA (*Garba Rujukan Digital*). Google Scholar was used to access a broader range of scholarly publications, while GARUDA was utilised to identify studies published in Indonesian academic journals. The primary literature was limited to publications released between 23 November 2021 and 23 November 2026. This time restriction was intended to ensure that the review focused primarily on developments in contemporary research. Nevertheless, several classical works were retained as conceptual foundations, particularly literature on social movement theory, contentious politics, and social accountability. These works were not treated as part of the contemporary research corpus but rather as theoretical sources to strengthen the interpretation.

The search strategy was developed using combinations of keywords related to social movements, state power, and accountability. In Google Scholar, the primary search combined the terms *"social movement"*, *"social movements"*, *"protest movement"*, and *"collective action"* with *"state power"*, *government*, *state*, *accountability*, *"social accountability"*, *oversight*, and *responsiveness*. Additional searches combined *"social movements"*, *"contentious politics"*, and *"civil society"* with *"political accountability"*, *"government responsiveness"*, *"policy change"*, and *"state repression"*. Meanwhile, searches in GARUDA employed Indonesian-language keywords, namely *"gerakan sosial"* (social movements), *"aksi kolektif"* (collective action), *"masyarakat sipil"* (civil society), *"negara"* (state), *"pemerintah"* (government), *"kekuasaan"* (power), *"akuntabilitas"* (accountability), *"pengawasan"* (oversight), and *"kontrol"* (control). These keyword combinations were used to identify literature addressing the relationship between social movements and state oversight, accountability, and responsiveness.

Table 1. Literature Selection Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Scholarly journal articles	Publications that are not scholarly journal articles
Published within the research period (2021-2026)	Published outside the research period
Discuss social movements or collective action	Not relevant to the focus of the review
Address state power, accountability, or government oversight	Do not adequately examine the relationship between social movements and state power
Full text available	Full text unavailable for examination

Source: Author (2026).

Literature analysis was conducted through data extraction and thematic analysis. During the extraction stage, information from each article was organised into a matrix covering the authors' names and publication years, research focus, research approach or methods, mechanisms through which social

movements perform their control function, state responses, main findings, and research limitations. This classification was intended to facilitate comparisons across publications and ensure that the synthesis was grounded in the substance of the studies examined.

Table 2. Extraction of Findings from Nine Articles

Authors and Research Focus	Method/Approach	Control or Participation Mechanisms
Yudistira & Husodo (2022): The Jakarta Kamisan Action and the struggle for human rights justice	Historical method: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography	Regular actions, submission of demand letters to the president, construction of collective memory, and enhancement of public critical awareness.
Sahid (2022): Governance of healthy and accountable civil society organisations	Conceptual article and discussion of civil society organisational practices	Strengthening social control through independent, credible, and transparent organisations with moral and social legitimacy.
Ekayanta (2022): Marginalisation of agrarian reform and food sovereignty agendas in formal politics	Social-critical paradigm	Criticism of elite and oligarchic dominance, alongside encouragement for grassroots movements to pursue reform agendas within the formal political arena.
Khusniah (2024): Social movements and human rights during Indonesia's democratic transition	Socio-legal approach drawing on legal and social science studies	Civil society mobilisation and critical awareness to promote changes in the political system and strengthen human rights protection.
Muliono & Nasuhaidi (2024): Youth protests against political dynasties	Qualitative approach, observation, and social media reports	Student mobilisation, the use of social media, issue framing, and protest actions demanding systemic change.
Syahwal (2024): Social movements in the legislative process concerning labour laws	Non-doctrinal approach, statutory approach, and case study	Opposition to the Job Creation Law and advocacy for the enactment of the Domestic Workers Protection Bill.
Mulyadi et al. (2024): Grassroots political participation through farmer groups in Bireuen	Qualitative approach	Institutionalisation of participation through farmer groups, organisation of community aspirations, partnership networks, and dialogue forums.
Taqwadin et al. (2025): Transitional justice advocacy in Aceh	Case study, in-depth interviews, and thematic analysis	Civil society advocacy, utilisation of political opportunities, alliance-building, and engagement with supportive elites.
Barlian et al. (2026): Demonstrations and the contestation of state legitimacy	Phenomenological approach, document analysis, media analysis, civil society reports, and social media	Demonstrations, articulation of criticism, moral pressure, and the creation of alternative public spaces to demand accountability.

Source: Author (2026).

Subsequently, the data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the stages proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, grouping codes into themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the analytical results. In this study, the coding process was directed towards six main themes, as follows:

Table 3. Thematic Coding Framework

Code	Main Theme	Subthemes or Initial Codes	Analytical Focus
T1	Relationship between Social Movements and State Power	Power asymmetry, elite dominance, conflicting interests, state legitimacy	Identifying the reasons behind the emergence of social movements and the relationship between society and the state.
T2	Mobilisation and Social Control Mechanisms	Demonstrations, advocacy, campaigns, public opinion pressure, collective organising	Identifying how social movements perform their control function.
T3	Accountability and State Responses	Government responses, neglect of demands, negotiation, accommodation, policy changes	Assessing how the state responds to public pressure.
T4	Political Structures and Opportunities	Political openness, elite relations, political allies, restrictions on political space	Analysing political conditions that support or constrain social movements.
T5	Organisational Capacity and Movement Legitimacy	Independence, resources, credibility, networks, solidarity, political capacity	Analysing internal factors that determine the strength of social movements.
T6	Effectiveness and Limitations of Social Movements	Advocacy outcomes, institutional changes, policy changes, failure to achieve demands	Assessing the extent to which social movements can constrain state power.

Source: Author (2026).

The final stage involved cross-article synthesis to explain how social movements perform their control function over state power and the conditions that influence their effectiveness. The synthesis focused on understanding the relationships between collective mobilisation, organisational capacity, political opportunities, state responses, and the outcomes achieved by social movements. Through this process, the study seeks to develop a conceptual understanding of social movements as non-electoral control mechanisms that can promote accountability and constrain the abuse of power, while also identifying the conditions under which this function does not necessarily result in policy changes or the fulfilment of public demands.

Table 4. Thematic Coding Matrix of the Nine Articles

No.	Authors (Year)	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6
1.	Yudistira & Husodo (2022)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
2.	Sahid (2022)					✓	✓
3.	Ekayanta (2022)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
4.	Khusniah (2024)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
5.	Muliono & Nasuhaidi (2024)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.	Syahwal (2024)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
7.	Mulyadi et al. (2024)		✓			✓	✓
8.	Taqwadin et al. (2025)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9.	Barlian et al. (2026)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓

Source: Author (2026).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study analyses nine journal articles published between 2022 and 2026. These articles examine social movements in various contexts, ranging from human rights struggles, the strengthening of civil society organisations, policy advocacy, protests against political dynasties, grassroots participation, to the pursuit of transitional justice in Aceh. This diversity of contexts provides an overview of the forms and dynamics of social movements in their interactions with state power.

Table 5. Comparison of State Responses and the Effectiveness of Social Movements

Authors	State Responses	Effectiveness or Outcomes	Limitations
Yudistira & Husodo (2022)	Government responses were limited. Of the 339 demand letters submitted during the SBY administration, only two received responses promising follow-up action.	Successfully maintained collective memory, critical awareness, and the continuity of demands for justice.	The continuation of protests does not guarantee the resolution of human rights violation cases.
Sahid (2022)	The study did not specifically measure government responses to civil society organisations' demands.	Explains the importance of organisational governance in strengthening the legitimacy and oversight capacity of civil society.	Conceptual in nature; it does not empirically examine the influence of organisations on state policy changes.
Ekayanta (2022)	The formal political arena was dominated by elite interests, resulting in the marginalisation of grassroots movement agendas.	Reveals structural barriers and oligarchic dominance in the pursuit of reform agendas.	Does not examine in detail the outcomes of advocacy or the control mechanisms employed by movements in specific cases.
Khusniah (2024)	The post-authoritarian political transformation was accompanied by constitutional changes and developments in human rights protection.	Demonstrates the contribution of civil society movements to democratic transition and the strengthening of human rights protection.	The discussion is historical and socio-legal in nature; mechanisms for overseeing the government in everyday practice are not examined in depth.
Muliono & Nasuhaidi (2024)	Protest movements were insufficient to influence and transform the political system in accordance with the demonstrators' demands.	Successfully generated broad mobilisation and disseminated criticism of political dynasties.	The entrenched culture of power and the complexity of democracy limited the movement's influence.
Syahwal (2024)	Movement demands concerning the Job Creation Law and domestic workers' protection were disregarded in the legislative process.	Successfully articulated demands and developed advocacy movements but did not achieve the legislative objectives they pursued.	Limited to two policy cases in the field of labour law.
Mulyadi et al. (2024)	Farmer groups' dependence on the government was one of the	Demonstrates the importance of grassroots groups as channels for expressing public aspirations, although their	Does not directly measure the control function or policy changes resulting

	obstacles to their political participation.	participatory capacity remains limited.	from farmer group activities.
Taqwadin et al. (2025)	The government tended to provide limited facilitation and largely disregard advocacy efforts, although direct repression was relatively limited.	The availability of political opportunities and support from allies contributed to the establishment of the Aceh Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2016.	The establishment of the institution does not mean that all justice-related demands of conflict victims have been fulfilled.
Barlian et al. (2026)	Institutional responses included public hearing forums and demands for improvements in the communication and ethical conduct of elected representatives.	Demonstrations served as spaces for articulating criticism and contesting state legitimacy through non-electoral participation.	The long-term impact on policy changes and institutional accountability remains uncertain.

Source: Author (2026).

In terms of research approaches, the reviewed literature is predominantly qualitative, employing a variety of research designs. Yudistira and Husodo (2022), for example, use a historical method to explain the development of the Jakarta Kamisan Action. Khusniah (2024) employs a socio-legal approach to examine the relationship between social movements and the development of human rights during Indonesia's democratic transition. Meanwhile, Muliono and Nasuhaidi (2024) investigate youth movement mobilisation using a qualitative approach. Taqwadin et al. (2025) employ a case study to explain the political opportunities and challenges involved in transitional justice advocacy in Aceh. Barlian et al. (2026), on the other hand, use a phenomenological approach to understand demonstrations as a form of civil society political action.

In addition to empirical studies, several articles offer conceptual explanations and critical analyses. Sahid (2022) discusses the importance of healthy and accountable governance within civil society organisations, while Ekayanta (2022) adopts a social-critical paradigm to explain oligarchic dominance in the formal political arena. Syahwal (2024) examines the relationship between social movements and the legal politics of labour-related legislation. Meanwhile, Mulyadi et al. (2024) discuss the institutionalisation of grassroots political participation through farmer groups in Bireuen Regency.

Overall, the nine articles demonstrate that social movements do not emerge solely in the form of demonstrations or protests, but also through advocacy, community organising, the strengthening of civil society organisations, and grassroots political participation. Nevertheless, not all the articles directly examine the control function of social movements over state power. Some provide conceptual foundations and explanations of organisational and participatory conditions that either support or constrain this function. Therefore, the reviewed literature can be understood as complementary in explaining the relationship between social movements, societal capacity, and state responses.

Social Movements as a Mechanism for Controlling State Power

Social movements can be understood as forms of collective action through which members of society express demands, question government decisions, and seek changes to conditions they perceive as unjust. In the relationship between society and the state, social movements play an important role when formal channels of representation are unable to accommodate public aspirations or when government policies fail to reflect societal interests. Social movements can therefore serve as a mechanism of control outside formal institutions, enabling citizens to monitor and question the exercise of state power.

The findings of Yudistira and Husodo (2022) on the Jakarta Kamisan Action (Aksi Kamisan) illustrate this function through the efforts of victims' families and civil society groups to demand the resolution of human rights violations. Held regularly every Thursday, the action provides a means of sustaining demands for justice while reminding the government of its responsibilities. The movement has also established inclusive networks and developed both regular activities and actions organised around specific events. One form of pressure involves submitting letters of demand to the president.

The article records that, during Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's administration, 339 letters of demand were submitted, but only two received replies containing promises of follow-up action. These findings demonstrate that social movements can sustain public oversight over the long term, even though the government's response to the demands remains limited.

The control function is also evident in social movements related to policymaking processes. Syahwal (2024) examines the movement opposing the Job Creation Law and advocacy efforts to secure the enactment of the Domestic Workers Protection Bill. Both movements demonstrate how society seeks to influence legislative processes through the expression of public aspirations and social pressure. However, the study finds that neither movement succeeded in achieving its objectives, and their demands received insufficient attention during the lawmaking process. This indicates that the presence of social movements does not automatically make decision-making processes responsive to societal interests.

In the context of electoral democracy, Muliono and Nasuhaidi (2024) show that youth movements opposing political dynasties employed issue framing, protest actions, and social media as instruments of mobilisation. The movement involved more than 700 universities across various regions of Indonesia. The scale of this mobilisation demonstrates the capacity of society, particularly university students, to generate public pressure around issues perceived as threats to democracy. Nevertheless, the study also finds that the movement was not sufficiently powerful to influence and transform the political system in accordance with the demonstrators' demands. Thus, large-scale mobilisation is more appropriately understood as a success in generating pressure and articulating criticism, rather than as evidence that structural change has been achieved.

The findings of Barlian et al. (2026) further reinforce the understanding of demonstrations as a non-electoral mechanism of control. Their study examines the series of demonstrations held on 25–31 August 2025, which demanded the dissolution of the House of Representatives (DPR). Demonstrations are understood as a political space for civil society to express criticism when communication between citizens and representative institutions has weakened. In this context, demonstrations are not merely acts of opposition; they also provide a means of questioning the moral legitimacy of state institutions and demanding transparency and accountability. The study indicates that democratic legitimacy is not established solely through elections, but is continually contested through interactions between the state and society.

Beyond demonstrations and policy advocacy, social movements can also perform a control function by pursuing broader political and legal changes. Khusniah (2024) explains that civil society movements are closely connected to Indonesia's democratic transition. Critical awareness and civil society mobilisation have contributed to the development of a more democratic political system and the advancement of human rights protection, including through amendments to the 1945 Constitution. These findings demonstrate that social movements do not merely monitor government policies in the short term; they can also promote institutional changes that reshape relations between the state and its citizens.

Based on these findings, the control functions of social movements can be distinguished into several forms: public oversight, the articulation of demands, pressure on policymaking processes, and the promotion of institutional change. These different forms demonstrate that the scope of social movements extends beyond demonstrations alone. Social movements can keep neglected issues on the public agenda, foster critical awareness, and encourage the state to account for its decisions and actions.

State Responses and the Dynamics of Accountability

The ability of social movements to control state power is closely related to the responses provided by government institutions. Public pressure can generate various forms of response, ranging from the neglect of demands to the creation of spaces for dialogue and the establishment of institutional mechanisms. Therefore, the effectiveness of social movements should not be assessed solely in terms of the intensity of mobilisation, but also in terms of the extent to which the state responds to public demands.

The findings of Yudistira and Husodo (2022) reveal the limited government response to the demands of the Kamisan Action. The substantial difference between the number of letters of demand submitted and the number that received replies indicates a gap between public oversight activities and government follow-up. A similar situation is evident in Syahwal's (2024) study, in which social

movements concerning labour issues failed to exert sufficient influence on the legislative process. Both studies demonstrate that the availability of channels for expressing public aspirations does not necessarily guarantee that societal demands will be considered in decision-making.

The neglect of public demands is also related to problems of representation within formal political arenas. Ekayanta (2022) explains that the consolidation of elite interests and oligarchic dominance can marginalise grassroots agendas from political processes. Under such conditions, accountability is not merely a matter of whether the government responds, but also of which actors have greater influence in determining policy directions. When elite interests prevail over public aspirations, the space for public control becomes increasingly constrained.

Nevertheless, the literature also shows that pressure from social movements can create opportunities for institutional responses. Taqwadin et al. (2025) find that civil society advocacy for transitional justice in Aceh contributed to the establishment of the Aceh Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2016. This outcome demonstrates that social movements can achieve institutional gains when political opportunities exist and support is available from other actors. However, the establishment of the commission does not in itself mean that all issues of justice for conflict victims have been resolved. Thus, the achievement of an institutional response must be distinguished from the substantive fulfilment of societal demands.

The study by Barlian et al. (2026) also identifies institutional responses following the demonstrations, including the organisation of public hearings with civil society organisations and initiatives by several legislators to improve the ethics and communication of representative institutions. These findings indicate that demonstrations can encourage the opening of communication channels between society and state institutions. However, such responses are not sufficient to demonstrate that sustainable policy changes have occurred.

Based on this comparison, accountability can be understood as a process involving several levels. First, recognition of the existence of public demands. Second, the provision of responses through communication or dialogue. Third, institutional follow-up on those demands. Fourth, changes in government policies or actions for which the government can be held accountable. Fifth, the substantive fulfilment of the societal interests that gave rise to the movement.

This distinction is important because a movement may succeed at one level without necessarily succeeding at another. A movement that attracts public attention, for example, may not necessarily secure policy changes. Similarly, the establishment of an institution as a result of advocacy does not necessarily guarantee that the issue being pursued will be resolved. Therefore, the effectiveness of social control needs to be assessed through the relationship between public pressure, state responses, and the concrete outcomes experienced by the groups advancing the demands.

Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Social Movements

The findings of this review indicate that the effectiveness of social movements does not depend solely on the forms of mobilisation employed. Several conditions influence the ability of movements to transform public pressure into influence over government policies and actions. These factors are primarily related to political opportunities, organisational capacity, legitimacy, support networks, and movement resources.

1. Political Opportunities and Relations with Elites

Political opportunities are among the conditions that determine the scope for social movements to operate. Institutional openness, changes in political configurations, relations among elites, and the presence of allies can influence a movement's opportunities to articulate its demands and secure support.

Taqwadin et al. (2025) illustrate this factor through their study of transitional justice advocacy in Aceh. The study identifies four dimensions of political opportunity: the openness or closure of the political system, relations among elites, facilitation or repression by those in power, and the presence of allies and opposition actors. Two important developments that created political opportunities for advocacy in Aceh were the fall of the Soeharto administration in 1998 and the signing of the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2005. These changes created political space in which the transitional justice agenda could be pursued further.

However, political openness does not necessarily mean that the government actively supports all the demands of a movement. Taqwadin et al. (2025) still identify limited facilitation by those in

power, despite the relatively low level of repression directed at the movement. This demonstrates that political opportunities can create space for advocacy, but its outcomes remain influenced by the relationships between movements, the government, and other political actors.

By contrast, Ekayanta (2022) demonstrates how oligarchic dominance within formal political arenas can constrain the influence of grassroots movements. The consolidation of elite interests makes it difficult for agendas concerning agrarian reform, food sovereignty, and redistribution to gain a foothold in formal political processes. Meanwhile, Muliono and Nasuhaidi (2024) show that entrenched power cultures and the complexity of democracy pose challenges for student movements seeking systemic change.

This comparison indicates that the effectiveness of social movements is influenced by the available structure of political opportunities. Movements may have strong demands and substantial public support, yet still encounter obstacles when political institutions are closed or elite interests are dominant. Conversely, the availability of political opportunities and the presence of allies can increase the likelihood that movements will influence institutional processes.

2. Organisational Capacity, Independence, and Legitimacy

In addition to external conditions, the internal capacity of organisations is an important factor in sustaining social movements. Sahid (2022) explains that civil society organisations cannot effectively perform their function of controlling state power if they have weak governance, lack credibility, and possess insufficient legitimacy. Civil society organisations need to uphold the principles of transparency, independence, fairness, accountability, and responsibility to establish their moral and social legitimacy.

The findings of Mulyadi et al. (2024) illustrate organisational capacity challenges in the context of farmer groups in Bireuen Regency. The study finds that the political participation of farmer groups remains relatively low due to gaps in political capacity, organisational fragmentation, limited resources, apathy, and dependence on the government. These conditions weaken the ability of farmer groups to develop and pursue political agendas that reflect their members' needs.

Both studies demonstrate that the existence of civil society organisations or community groups does not automatically translate into the capacity to exercise control over the state. Organisations need the capacity to identify problems, articulate demands, build networks, and maintain their independence. Excessive dependence on the government may also reduce the critical space available to organisations in carrying out their oversight functions.

Therefore, organisational capacity is not merely related to the ability to recruit members or organise activities, but also to the ability to maintain legitimacy and independence in pursuing societal interests. Organisations with strong governance and networks are better positioned to perform their control functions sustainably.

3. Networks, Solidarity, and Movement Resources

Networks and solidarity are other factors that help social movements maintain their continuity. Yudistira and Husodo (2022) show that the Kamisan Action network is inclusive and relatively loosely organised. This characteristic enables the involvement of various individuals and organisations in sustaining the struggle for justice for victims of human rights violations.

In the context of transitional justice advocacy, Taqwadin et al. (2025) also emphasise the importance of allies trusted by the movement. Support from other actors can increase the likelihood that advocacy efforts will attract attention and gain access to institutional processes. Meanwhile, Mulyadi et al. (2024) demonstrate that limited partnership networks and resources create obstacles for farmer groups seeking to strengthen their political participation.

These findings indicate that networks do not merely serve to expand the number of supporters; they can also facilitate information exchange, capacity-building, and broader political access. Solidarity enables groups to avoid confronting problems in isolation, while support networks can help movements sustain their demands when facing institutional obstacles.

Thus, the sustainability of social movements requires a combination of organisational capacity, independence, support networks, and resources. These factors help movements maintain public pressure and increase their opportunities to obtain a response from the state.

Effectiveness, Limitations, and Conceptual Synthesis

Based on the nine articles analysed, the effectiveness of social movements cannot be understood as a single category of success or failure. Social movements can generate changes in public awareness, political communication spaces, institutional responses, and policies. However, achievements at one level are not necessarily accompanied by success at other levels.

At the level of articulation and public awareness, the Kamisan Action and the student movement opposing political dynasties demonstrate the ability of movements to sustain public issues and generate societal attention. The Kamisan Action has helped preserve collective memory of human rights violations, while the student movement has achieved large-scale mobilisation through social media and protest actions. Nevertheless, these achievements have not automatically resulted in the resolution of human rights cases or changes to the political system as demanded by movement participants (Yudistira & Husodo, 2022; Muliono & Nasuhaidi, 2024).

At the level of institutional responses, transitional justice advocacy in Aceh demonstrates an achievement through the establishment of the Aceh Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Meanwhile, the demonstrations examined by Barlian et al. (2026) illustrate the opening of communication channels between civil society organisations and representative institutions. Both findings show that social movements can encourage state institutions to respond. However, the existence of an institution or the opening of dialogue is not sufficient to ensure that the substantive demands of society have been fulfilled.

At the level of policy change, Syahwal's (2024) study demonstrates the limited influence of social movements on legislative processes. Ekayanta (2022) also shows that the dominance of elite interests can prevent grassroots agendas from entering formal political arenas. Both studies emphasise that public pressure may encounter obstacles when decision-making structures do not provide adequate space for societal interests.

Meanwhile, Sahid (2022) and Mulyadi et al. (2024) help explain why some community groups have limited capacity to exercise control. Weak governance, insufficient legitimacy, limited resources, and dependence on the government can undermine organisations' ability to maintain their independence and pursue their members' interests.

Taken together, these findings reveal an important pattern: social movements have the potential to control state power, but the realisation of this potential depends on the relationship between the movements' internal capacity and external political conditions. Mobilisation can generate public pressure, but organisational capacity is necessary to sustain a movement. Political opportunities can provide access to institutions, but the state's response determines whether such pressure will be followed up. Therefore, the relationship between mobilisation, political opportunities, organisational capacity, and state responses needs to be understood as an interconnected process.

Based on this synthesis, this study conceptualises social movements as a non-electoral mechanism of control operating through three main processes. First, the generation of public pressure through collective mobilisation, advocacy, and the articulation of demands. Second, the strengthening of society's bargaining position through organisational capacity, legitimacy, networks, and the utilisation of political opportunities. Third, interaction with the state, which may result in the recognition of demands, dialogue, institutional responses, policy changes, or, alternatively, neglect and restrictions.

This framework demonstrates that social movements do not always succeed in constraining state power in the sense of directly producing policy changes. Nevertheless, movements can still perform a control function by keeping public issues on the agenda, questioning the legitimacy of government decisions, and demanding accountability from state institutions. Accordingly, the success of social movements should be assessed in terms of the level of influence they achieve and their ability to sustain oversight of the exercise of power.

Overall, the findings of this review confirm that social movements constitute an important component of democratic oversight mechanisms. Their existence complements formal mechanisms of control, including elections, representative institutions, and state oversight bodies. However, their effectiveness is not automatic. Social movements are more likely to promote accountability when supported by independent and credible organisations, strong solidarity networks, adequate resources, and political opportunities that allow public demands to gain a place in decision-making processes.

CONCLUSION

Based on the literature review, social movements constitute a non-electoral mechanism of control through which society can monitor, criticise, and exert pressure on state power through demonstrations, advocacy, collective mobilisation, and community organising. However, their effectiveness is determined not merely by the scale of mobilisation, but also by organisational capacity, independence, legitimacy, support networks, and political opportunities.

The findings indicate that social movements can raise public awareness, create spaces for dialogue, and generate institutional responses and policy changes. Nevertheless, these outcomes are not always achieved due to elite dominance, weak organisational capacity, and low government responsiveness. Accordingly, social movements have the potential to strengthen accountability and democracy when supported by strong organisations, solid networks, and an open political environment.

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