



# Civil Society's Freedom of Expression in Public Sphere: A Mural Artist Perspective

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**Abstract.** Every Indonesian citizen has the right to express themselves in public spaces. The form of conveying citizen expressions in public spaces can go through murals. In the August–September period of 2021, the media was heralded by the news of the removal of murals in several locations in Indonesia. Public Order Enforcers removed some of the murals identified as containing a load of criticism as a form of an extension of the hands of the state. This abolition phenomenon is related to murals' role in people's lives. A mural, ideally a reflection of freedom of expression and thought in public spaces, is either an artist or a group of people who deliberately make murals. Civic Education looked at the phenomenon from the perspective of implementing freedom of expression from the standpoint of the mural artist. This study uses a qualitative and case study method in Bandung, Indonesia. Mural in Bandung City serves as a garden dressing so that the garden is more beautiful and can serve as a pleasant open space where Bandung citizens are active. Then, Bandung murals play a role in educating residents on social and environmental issues and decorating certain villages to increase tourism. A mural can be judged as one of the means of expression of both individuals and communities, which in its activities remain restricted and compliant with the norms and ethics prevailing in society.

**Keywords:** Civil Society · Freedom of Expression · Mural · Public Sphere

## 1 Introduction

Indonesia is a country that uses democracy as a system of government. A democratic system of government guarantees the rights of its citizens, including the right to expression in public spaces. A definition of expression is an expressive description of behavior that includes information, communication, influence, and persuasion [1]. Freedom of expression can be realized with the right to gain knowledge widely, unlimitedly express opinions, and do works, including creating wall paintings. In the August–September 2021 period, the mass media was heralded by the emergence of a mural removal phenomenon that the government has criticized. Public Order Enforcers removed some murals identified as containing a load of criticism in various regions of Indonesia. The wonder of the removal of murals in Pasuruan, East Java, said “Forced to Health in the Sick Country” mural “God I’m Hungry,” the mural “Jokowi 4.0: Not Found” in Tangerang city, then

removed by the authorities because it was considered destructive to the beauty of the environment. The removal of murals in Bandung and Tangerang, like the president, was removed because of it [2–5]. This abolition phenomenon is related to murals' role in people's lives.

Murals are categorized as public art whose role represents, empowers, and is capable of expressing public opinion, a permanent reminder of certain events, including those that can contain criticism [6, 7]. Murals may also serve as intermediaries for criticism from a particular group of societies over certain powers through murals and wall art whose activities have existed since prehistoric times. Murals, the art of wall painting that we generally find in open spaces, have evolved with the development of society. Murals as street art with wall media, usually using spray paint, have their characteristics, one of which is an alternative to the public visual space media in public space [5, 8–10]. Indeed, in its development, murals in urban landscapes may appear either as a promotion of urban policy or as a result of the grassroots community: personal or community expression of a particular matter [11].

The removal of murals can hurt the democratic life of Indonesia, especially in civil liberties in Indonesia. Referring to the 2020 Indonesian democratic data published in 2021, Indonesia's democratic index, according to The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), is declining. Meanwhile, the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) on its website [bps.go.id/indicator](https://bps.go.id/indicator) shows that Indonesia's democratic score has decreased from 2018–2020 in terms of threats or use of violence by government officials who hinder freedom of opinion, [12]. Meanwhile, according to Amnesty International records, civil liberties in Indonesia in 2020 declined, even the worst in the last ten years. Civil liberty in question includes freedom of expression, freedom of movement, and freedom of the press. From a score of 1–10, Indonesian civil rights fell to 5.59. In the latest data release of 2022, referring to the democratic conditions in Indonesia in 2021, Indonesia's democratic index is on the rise. However, the Indonesian category is still classified as a flawed democracy or a flawed democracy. There is the freedom of civil society to participate in the will; public opinion can be an effort to improve the quality of democracy.

That is undoubtedly interrelated. Nation, citizens, and democratic lives are intertwined. The implementation of freedom of expression in Indonesia, basically regulated by the Constitution of the Basic Law of the Republic of Indonesia in 1945, guarantees freedom of expression, namely in Articles 28 (2) and (3) of the Basic Law of the State of Indonesia in 1945 which contains, (2) everyone has the right to freedom of expression. According to his conscience, believing beliefs and expressing thoughts and attitudes, (3) Everyone has the right to freedom of union, to gather and express opinions. A citizen is a person who contributes to matters concerning justice and deliberation in the life of democracy [13]. Maintaining a democratic society depends on citizens and political institutions with idealism [14]. Significant factors in democratic life are the quality of citizens and the relationship of citizens with countries that can fill each other. This study looked at removing murals related to freedom of expression from the mural artist's point of view. This study aims to describe the role of murals in people's lives from the perspective of mural artists and explore the freedom of expression from the standpoint of mural artists.

## 2 Literary Review

The mural removal event did not occur only in Indonesia. The following literature describes the events of mural removal in other countries. In previous studies, the events of mural removal were related to the country's context. The mural in Palestine, identified as a form of resistance, did not last long, as it was quickly removed by the Israeli army [15]. In contrast to Quito, Ecuador's capital, in July 2019, there was a destruction of the Amor No Tiene Genero mural (Love Has No Gender), which marked a counterpoint to the LGBTQ community in Ecuador's public sphere. It is also associated with the country's Constitutional Court after a landmark ruling to legalize marriage between couples of the same sex [16].

Furthermore, the events of mural removal were described by Chandra Morrison; erasure is never innocuous but instead changes the public view of the deleted content. The elimination of street art in public spaces, not just murals. Stockholm metro train station, Sweden, graffiti removal event also took place. According to David Karlander, the abolition marks two things: presenting graffiti as an illegitimate, unrealistic, and threatening public space harmony, and the policy related to cleanliness and pollution deviations. The police in Stockholm took swift action, removing within 24 h of reporting. Censorship of graffiti creates a tendency if graffiti is made by young people associated with crime [17].

## 3 Art in Public Space

Artworks in public spaces have a long history. In her book *Street Art, Public City*, Alison Young, In the late 1990s, a new form of marker appeared in public spaces, later called 'street art. Rapid development followed city street art, graffiti, and political slogans [18]. Furthermore, art in public spaces can help form a city. A city is more than just streetscapes and cartography but an image, symbol, mood, and comfort. Street art is not a communication practice that leads to advertising like billboards or posters. The street art in question has an urban art equivalent, as the placement is located near the street, abandoned buildings, or behind the warehouse. Street art has many types, such as trail markers, graffiti, stencils, murals, etc.

The development of street art is independent of the cultural aspect of community development. The interest of street artists began with an appeal that later developed into a draw. Typically, these artists begin their careers and motivations through graffiti, then form into punk, skateboarding, zine, performance art, poetry, or stencil, [18]. Graffiti is used for code writing to communicate between street artists. In its development, the form of street art developed more massively and communally to create expressive wall paintings.

Murals are a type of street art that people use to express solidarity, opinions, support, group ideals, events, or political issues such as criticism and protest [6]. Places with murals in public space arrangements create a unique sense of urban space [19]. Indeed, in its placement, murals may also contain divisions of two camps, political differences, and even paramilitary groups seen on the streets near the house to the enormous city hall. Murals are not independent of the role of mural artists. The 800th-anniversary

celebration of Leipzig in East Germany involved visual artists actively decorating new buildings with murals and sculptures and creating the Seventh District Art Exhibition [20]. Artists are also involved in the publication of posters, brochures, and exhibitions of works they make.

## 4 Freedom of Expression

This article requires a lot of effort. He also published literature on freedom of expression. An understanding of freedom of expression is based on the expression's use. Expressions can be represented by their function in the social environment, individually and socially [1]. Expressions represent self-identification, as a means of self-establishment, including expressing the opinions of others. Expressions can also be a means of hearing and bonding ideas with others. Socially, expression can support and support community social activities, such as community forums, which serve to discuss government policies and actions. This suggests that socially free expression supports citizen participation.

Freedom of expression can also be regarded as social freedom. The concept used, e.g., someone A is socially free to do something if people in area A allow A from doing something, [21]. Freedom of expression can only be gained if a socially free society expresses its face when and where they are.

Mather H Kramer wrote, for example, the phrase "the concept of expression," "the concept of speech," "the concept of communication," and "the concept of speech" are often used in the equivalent of the exact phrase, [22]. The word 'speech' in everyday use is narrower than expression and communication. Writings, dances, artistic creations, and musical compositions are classified by expression and communication. The phrase "freedom of expression" refers to the moral principle of freedom of expression, which limits the freedom of communication and activities of the society. Compliance with the same system allows the relationship between the government system and its people to share the same principles. On the other hand, freedom of expression generally demonstrates a person's physical and psychological ability to be involved in various activities, such as a communicative activity.

## 5 Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach to describe the case of mural removal, then explodes more deeply freedom of expression from the perspective of mural artists. In qualitative research, case studies explore the processes, activities, and events. This study uses the case study method and assays to find out in-depth about the unique event registering the removal of murals. The selected research participants are mural artists and the mural community from Bandung City. Bandung City was chosen because Bandung is known as a beautiful city in terms of urban layout and rich in culture. In 2020, the Ministry of Home Affairs rated Bandung City as a 2020 Very Innovative City. This study's research procedures include data collection through interviews, observation, and documentation [23]. Meanwhile, the process of validity and reversibility of the study was carried out by triangulating the source of information data and applying checking members to participants.

## 6 Results and Discussion

The selected research participant is the chairman of one of the mural communities in Bandung, AI, and the mural artists engaged in Bandung, AP. Concerning research ethics, the identity of the research participant's name has the right not to include the full name. In a face-to-face interview with AP, some information was related to mural roles and activities as mural artists. The mural is the language of art; everyone can see it because the medium used is a massive wall, and it is placed in public spaces that people from all walks of life can see. Murals contain goals, aspirations, and criticisms that will be conveyed to raise awareness. According to her, making murals is usually done in groups and raises social, political, or environmental issues. The purpose, of course, is to educate the people. She gave an example. For example, there is a mural, "Don't Throw Garbage," which encourages residents to be ashamed of throwing garbage into the area because it is indeed a beautiful place because there is a mural. Murals can beautify certain areas and transform them into more comfortable ones. Murals in Bandung are usually used to revitalize the parks in Bandung, or residents want filial social activities in the murals (Fig. 1).

AI explains more information on murals. According to him, there are differences between manufacturing street art murals and graffiti. Murals use wall paint and brushes, while graffiti uses spray paint in its manufacture. Culturally, these two things are also different. Graffiti processes quickly and is intended for images and writings that are 'bombing.' Originally, graffiti was used to mark each group's territory. It is usually considered a mere scribble or vandalism, but indeed between groups, understand the tagging of other groups. Unlike murals, the duration of mural work is more extended, starting with sketches, such as painting on canvas, but this is the medium of walls. On average, murals are placed in public spaces; permits are obtained before making murals. If it belongs to the factory or the community, permit it to the owner of the building or the assembly of the area. Related to the role of murals in Bandung, the presence of murals can improve the quality of people's lives. When there are murals, the park becomes more natural and more beautiful, and the public appreciates the public space when it's active. Originally, areas with a hostile atmosphere became more positive when they were moved with murals.



**Fig. 1.** Mural's in Saparua Park, Bandung, Indonesia.



**Fig. 2.** The mural beautifies the basketball court in Saparua Park, Bandung.

According to AP, murals can be considered freedom of expression for mural artists. In an artist's sphere, murals can be a form of freedom of expression. For example, individual mural artists have personal agitation, and other mural artists' friends share the same rage and are then poured into work, including murals. Regarding the abolition of murals as one the works of art, it should not be afraid works of art. The artist's freedom of expression can remain expressive, but it remains safe; of course, this freedom of expression is limited by the values that exist in society. AI also expresses the opinion of murals as freedom of expression for artists. According to him, murals and graffiti should be seen as songs, poetry, and movies, as a form of freedom of expression. The removal of murals has occurred frequently, but they have only been exposed. Concerning freedom of expression, everyone has their scope, individually, in society, and even as global citizens. Freedom of expression is limited by ethics that are always associated with norms. These norms are binding in the personal, family, public, and global spheres (Fig. 2).

### 6.1 Murals' Role in People's Lives

Murals are different from other graffiti and street art; murals are planned and grouped and with more extended periods in public wall media. Graffiti, described by AI, is usually used to mark certain areas of power; furthermore, this, according to Young, is used to communicate whose sign can only be read by fellow graffiti artists [18]. The mural is the language of art used by the public to express the opinions or ideas of a particular group [6]. Murals have various roles in people's lives; in the Palestinian Gaza Strip, murals are used as a means of resistance and in mass message delivery media. Other Middle Eastern countries, such as Iran, were also used as a reminder of the 1979 Islamic Revolution or the 1980–1988 war that resulted in the country's deaths and religion [24]. Murals are categorized as public art whose role represents, empowers, and is capable of being an expression of public opinion, a permanent reminder of certain events. However, these murals also developed into commercial businesses and sponsors of beauty-themed murals, which did not touch practical political activities [6, 15, 25]. It's what makes murals and wall painting that still exists today. Murals in Bandung are used to revitalize parks in Bandung, such as Saparua Park, and the

demand to decorate particular area walls, such as in Cibunut village. The colorful town of Cibunut, of course, adds to the attractiveness of Bandung city tourism. Mural also serves as a specific messenger, in which case it curates citizens. Murals brought out by communities raise issues related to what is going on or citizens' social, environmental, and educational problems, such as maintaining cleanliness. Beautiful gardens, beautiful murals, and currying to be prohibited from making hash give citizens the shade of dumping garbage in an already beautiful region. The presence of murals can positively impact society with proper procedures, such as the requirement of the wall's owner before drawing the murals.

## 6.2 Freedom of Expression in the Perspective of Mural Artists

Murals, such as songs, poetry, and movies, can be considered freedom of expression. Songs, poems, films, and murals are forms of expression as a social and self-identification [1]. It corresponds to the phrase 'freedom of expression' written by Mather H Kramer, which refers to writing, dancing, artistic creation, and musical composition as classified by expression and communication related to community activity [22]. Mural artists associated freedom of expression with security in work, without intimidation and fear, remain limited by the value of society. Indeed, the concept of freedom of expression is limited by social freedom standardized as right-wrong by a community in a particular environment. Freedom of expression in a citizen's public space has its scope, individually, in society, and even among global citizens. Freedom of expression is limited by ethics that are always associated with norms. These norms are binding in the personal, family, public, and global spheres. By comparison, The European Court of Human Rights attributes the concept of freedom of expression to a democratic society limited by public morality [26]. The idea reinforces the phrase 'freedom of expression restricted by norms and values corresponding to people in a particular region.

## 7 Conclusion

Based on explanations and discussions of results and discussions, murals can be inferred to play a role in people's lives, such as expressing opinions, group ideals, forms of resistance and criticism, to mass message delivery. Murals in Bandung play a role in revitalizing public spaces and supporting parks in Bandung, such as Saparua Park. Murals also positively impact certain areas, such as the colorful town of Cibunut, adding to the attractiveness of Bandung city tourism. Murals are a form of freedom of expression, such as songs, poetry, or movies, demonstrating public expression and activity. According to mural artists, freedom of expression is to create works without fear and remain safe. The phrase 'freedom of expression' in working does not escape the existence of values and norms in society.

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