

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOVERNANCE IN IMPROVING DIGITAL LITERACY FOR THE PREVENTION OF ONLINE GAMBLING IN THE MINISTRY OF RELIGIOUS OF BOJONEGORO REGENCY

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received 12 December 2025

Revised 8 January 2026

Accepted 13 February 2026

Keywords

Public participation;

Digital literacy;

Online gambling prevention;

Participatory governance;

Ministry of Religion

ABSTRACT

This study aims to comprehensively analyze the role of the Bojonegoro District Ministry of Religious Affairs in building public participation through strengthening digital literacy based on religious values as an effort to prevent online gambling. The focus of the research problem lies in the low quality of community participation, which is still symbolic and does not yet show active involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of policies. In this context, public participation does not yet fully reflect empowerment but remains at a consultative level without a balanced distribution of power between the government and the community. This study uses Sherry R. Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation Theory to identify the position and dynamics of ongoing participation. The approach used is a qualitative case study with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation analysis. The results of the study show that public participation is still at a tokenistic level, characterized by one-way communication, limited dialogue spaces, and the dominance of top-down policy approaches. Therefore, this study recommends strengthening participatory governance through inclusive dialogue forums, secure and responsive reporting systems, cross-sector collaboration, and the strengthening of digital literacy based on religious values in a sustainable and structured manner.

INTRODUCTION

The value of online gambling transactions has reached trillions of rupiah, and the Religious Court (Agama, 2024) reports that 17% of divorces in the region are triggered by economic factors and digital behavior, including online gambling. The lack of public digital participation in mitigating online gambling shows that countermeasures will be ineffective without digital literacy and community collaboration. The high social impact shows that online gambling is not only a legal issue, but also a serious threat to family resilience and



DOI : <https://doi.org/10.24076/58p62p39>

Ramandani et.all, Public Participation Governance in Improving Digital Literacy for The Prevention of Online Gambling in The Ministry of Religious of Bojonegoro Regency (2026)

social cohesion. The low level of community digital participation in online gambling mitigation efforts indicates that countermeasures will be less effective if they are not accompanied by strengthening digital literacy and meaningful public collaboration.

Legally, online gambling is prohibited under Article 27 paragraph 2 in conjunction with Article 45 paragraph 2 of the ITE Law. Efforts to mitigate online gambling cannot rely solely on regulations but require government collaboration and public participation. The government has launched the National Digital Literacy Movement (Siberkreasi) as part of the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) to Public participation is a crucial element in the successful implementation of public policy (Bappenas, 2020).

Public participation is a crucial aspect of democratic policy governance (Arnstein, 1969) through his concept of the Ladder of Citizen Participation, criticizing public participation practices that are often superficial and only place citizens as objects of policy. Arnstein emphasizes that participation must be understood as a transfer of power from the government to citizens, not just procedural involvement. He divides participation into three main categories: non-participation, tokenism, and citizen power, which represent levels of public influence ranging from manipulation to substantive control over policy. This framework positions participation as a matter of politics and power, not merely an administrative mechanism. Therefore, the quality of participation can be measured by the extent to which citizens have access to information, deliberative spaces, and the ability to influence public decisions.

In the context of digital governance, Arnstein's criticism is relevant because online participation often remains in the realm of symbolism, information, and consultation, without guaranteeing real influence in the policy process. Empirical observations show that in Bojonegoro Regency, digital participation is still limited to the level of informing. The community tends to only receive information and is less active in reporting, monitoring, or educating about online gambling. This phenomenon can be seen in data from the (Agama, 2024). This condition shows that minimal digital literacy is a structural barrier that prevents the community from moving from mere formalities to citizen empowerment, according to Arnstein. Therefore, digital literacy is not only a technical competency but also social capital in building meaningful public participation.

The development of digital technology has changed the way people interact, access information, and participate in public life (Chadwick, 2017). Digital transformation has also impacted governance and opened up opportunities for citizen participation through digital channels (Dahlgren, 2018). According to (APJII, 2024) the number of internet users in Indonesia has reached 221 million, or 79.5% of the population. However, the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kominfo, 2023) notes that Indonesia's digital literacy index is still at 3.65 (moderate category). The gap between digital access and literacy skills shows that increased internet penetration does not always increase digital participation (Pennycook et al., 2020)

Low digital literacy leads to increased exposure to risky content, including online gambling. (Kompas, 2024) notes that Indonesia ranks 14th in terms of internet usage duration, but its population still lacks adequate digital skills. Online gambling has multidimensional impacts, including threats to family economic stability, mental health issues, and potential crime (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017) Without good digital literacy, people not only become passive consumers but are also vulnerable to becoming perpetrators and victims of illegal digital activities (Vosoughi et al., 2018). In this context, research by Esa Septian and Wulandari (2024) reveals that community participation, especially among young people, plays an important role in building literacy through digital platforms that involve active engagement. When citizens are directly involved in accessing,



interpreting, and discussing digital information, it not only improves their literacy skills but also fosters critical awareness of public issues. This pattern of participation is relevant as a strategy for preventing online gambling, as the development of digital literacy through active engagement can reduce the vulnerability of the community to manipulative content. In this context, research by (Septian et al., 2024) reveals that community participation, especially among young people, plays an important role in building literacy through digital platforms that involve active engagement. When citizens are directly involved in accessing, interpreting, and discussing digital information, it not only improves their literacy skills but also fosters critical awareness of public issues. This pattern of participation is relevant as a strategy for preventing online gambling, as the development of digital literacy through active engagement can reduce the vulnerability of the community to manipulative content.

Empirically, online gambling cases in Bojonegoro demonstrate significant social impacts. The Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Center (PPATK, 2024) notes the strengthening of citizens' capacity to use technology critically and responsibly (Bappenas, 2020). However, the implementation of digital literacy policies at the regional level, including Bojonegoro, is still largely informative and has not yet reached a participatory and collaborative model.

In this context, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as a public institution, has a strategic role not only as an institution for religious development but also as a facilitator of public participation in digital social risk mitigation. Through religious teachers (ustadz), educational institutions, and religious communities, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has the potential to raise awareness, promote religion-based digital literacy, and strengthen public participation in efforts to mitigate online gambling. However, the facilitated participation is still largely informative and has not yet reached the consultative or collaborative levels described by Arnstein.

However, most previous studies still discuss digital literacy, online gambling prevention, and public participation separately. (Isabella, 2023) reveals that the implementation of digital policies in Indonesia is still non-participatory. Meanwhile, (Samudra et al., 2025) emphasizes that public digital literacy is still at a technical level and has not developed collaboratively. (Dy Permana, 2024) states that online gambling prevention policies in Indonesia are still reactive and not yet integrated with digital literacy strategies. Although official religious institutions through the Ministry of Religious Affairs have expressed concern about the increase in online gambling and called for preventive measures, to date there has been little academic analysis evaluating the effectiveness of these policies in the context of participatory governance. Research by (Rahmawatul Hasanah et al., 2025) shows that Islamic financial institutions can play an important role in preventing online gambling by offering halal financial alternatives and improving financial literacy, an approach that can complement the formal role of the state in mitigation. A study conducted by researchers at Makassar State University shows that integrating digital and financial literacy into values-based or character-based education can improve people's ability to resist online gambling offers (Setialaksana et al., 2024). However, there has not yet been a comprehensive study analyzing the role of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in building public participation based on religious digital literacy to mitigate online gambling using a participatory governance framework and Arnstein's participation model, particularly in the context of rising divorce rates.

This study uses Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969) as the main framework for analyzing the quality of community participation in mitigating online gambling. Arnstein divides public participation into three main levels: non-participation, tokenism, and citizen power. This framework not only examines whether the community



is formally present or involved, but also assesses the extent to which they have access to information, consultation spaces, and opportunities to partner and influence policy. Based on this theory, this study uses three indicators of participation: (1) access to information, (2) involvement in consultation or reporting, and (3) partnership in public oversight or education. These indicators help assess whether community participation is limited to receiving information (informing), expressing opinions (consulting), or has entered the realm of citizen power through partnership and active oversight. Thus, Arnstein's theory serves as a basis for evaluating the extent to which community participation in Bojonegoro and the role of religious institutions have shifted from symbolic participation to meaningful and empowering participation.

Based on these conditions, the question arises as to how participatory governance can be established in efforts to mitigate online gambling and disinformation through the role of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, particularly in the context of rising divorce rates in Bojonegoro Regency. This study specifically aims to analyze how the Ministry of Religious Affairs builds public participation based on religious digital literacy in mitigating online gambling and how the dynamics of collaboration between actors occur in the context of participatory governance. Theoretically, this research contributes to strengthening the study of digital public participation based on religious values. Practically, this research provides a policy model for the Ministry of Religious Affairs and local governments in strengthening family resilience through the prevention of online gambling.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of how the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Bojonegoro Regency builds community participation through religious values-based digital literacy in mitigating online gambling. The study was conducted in Bojonegoro Regency from October to December 2025. Case studies were chosen because they allow researchers to explore phenomena contextually, holistically, and in depth in complex real-world environments (Creswell, 2018) Furthermore, case studies are considered relevant for comprehensively examining the role of institutions, policies, and social dynamics that occur at the research site (Sugiyono, 2019). This approach is also relevant to the use of Arnstein's Ladder of Participation theory (Arnstein, 1969) as it allows researchers to analyze in depth how levels of community participation, from non-participation to citizen power, are manifested in religious digital literacy-based online gambling mitigation programs. Thus, the case study approach not only describes phenomena but also facilitates analysis of power dynamics and levels of community involvement in public policy.



Informants were selected using purposive sampling, considering that they had direct involvement, knowledge, and experience related to the issue being studied. The research informants consisted of:

Table 1. Type Informant

No.	Type of Informant	Number
1.	Officials from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Islamic Guidance Division	2
2.	Religious leaders and advisors	2
3.	Communities involved in or affected by digital literacy programs and online gambling prevention efforts	5
Amount		9

Source: Primary data processed by the author (2026)

The selection of informants aims to obtain a comprehensive perspective on policy, implementation, and the social experiences of the community. According to (Creswell,2018) purposive sampling is used in qualitative research to select individuals who are considered to have the best understanding of the phenomenon being studied. This is in line with (Sugiyono,2019) , who states that purposive sampling is effective when researchers need informants with the capacity and relevance to the research focus. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document study. Interviews were used to explore the perspectives and experiences of key actors related to program implementation. Participant observation is conducted to directly observe the mechanisms of counseling, digital literacy, and forms of public participation. Document studies include Ministry of Religious Affairs regulations, program reports, counseling documents, digital literacy guidelines, as well as PPAK and Religious Court data. The object of this study is the governance of religious digital literacy-based public participation in the mitigation of online gambling.

Data analysis used an interactive analysis (Miles, M.B., Huberman, a. m., & Saldana, 2015) that included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. The data was analyzed by identifying the main themes related to institutional roles, religion-based digital literacy, and forms of public participation. To ensure data validity, this study did not rely on a single source of information. Data were collected and analyzed through a combination of interviews, direct field observations, and in-depth reviews of relevant documents. This approach is in line with the views of (Nurfajriani & Ilhami, 2024) , who state that data triangulation is a crucial step in qualitative research to evaluate the consistency of information by comparing various sources and methods of data collection. Furthermore, research by (Chitwattanakorn et al., 2024) shows that the use of triangulation, particularly source triangulation, helps reduce researcher bias and strengthens the credibility of the results. When data from one source is confirmed by another source, a cross-verification process automatically occurs, allowing researchers to interpret the data more carefully. Here, triangulation is not merely a technical procedure, but part of the researcher's reflection to understand complex social realities. This view is supported by the article (Andarusni Alfansyur, 2022) which emphasizes that triangulation of sources enables more comprehensive data management. By connecting various types of data, researchers can see the complete relationship between information and avoid partial conclusions. Therefore, the application of source



triangulation in this study is the main foundation for strengthening the analysis of findings, especially through the comparison of data from policymakers, field implementers, and relevant official documents.

This study also emphasizes the importance of ethical aspects in the research process, particularly in relation to maintaining the confidentiality of informants, respecting the sensitivity of religious issues, and protecting their personal data. Because the topic of online gambling often carries social stigma and involves deep personal values, we strive to foster comfortable and respectful relationships with informants from the early stages of the study. This step aims to ensure that their involvement is voluntary, without coercion, and based on sufficient knowledge about the purpose and conduct of the research. Before the data collection process began, all informants provided their written consent, or what is known as informed consent, after receiving a thorough explanation of the research objectives, the type of participation expected, and their right to refuse or withdraw from participation at any time. This step is in line with the views of (Xu et al., 2020) who emphasize that informed consent is a crucial component in research involving human participants, especially to ensure that participation is voluntary and based on complete understanding. In addition, we also pay attention to the aspect of privacy protection in this study. The identities of the informants were concealed, and personal data was handled with strict restrictions to avoid misuse of information and harmful social consequences. This approach is in line with the research of (Yusof et al., 2022) which states that data protection and information transparency during the consent process are essential elements of research ethics, especially in the era of increasingly complex modern research. Thus, the application of ethical principles in this study is not only procedural in nature, but also part of the researcher's moral responsibility to respect the dignity, safety, and rights of informants. This ethical approach is expected to strengthen trust in the research process while improving the quality and integrity of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of field data analysis indicate that community participation in efforts to prevent online gambling in Bojonegoro Regency remains at a relatively low level and has not yet reached a stage of meaningful engagement. Referring to the ladder of citizen participation introduced by (Arnstein, 1969) the pattern of involvement observed in this study can be categorized within the symbolic or tokenistic level of participation. Data obtained from three main groups of informant religious leaders, officials from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and members of the general public consistently reveal that community engagement is largely limited to receiving information, attending socialization activities, and participating in limited consultation forums.

Although these mechanisms formally provide space for public involvement, they do not substantially redistribute decision-making power to the community. In several instances, participation took the form of appeasement, where community input was acknowledged but not necessarily integrated into policy formulation or implementation. Communication patterns tended to be one-directional, and strategic decisions remained dominated by governmental actors. Consequently, there is no empirical evidence indicating the existence of genuine partnership, delegated power, or citizen control. This finding underscores that community participation in online gambling prevention efforts in Bojonegoro Regency is still predominantly procedural rather than transformative.



Informing

Within the framework of the Ladder of Citizen Participation proposed by Arnstein (1969), informing is the initial stage of public participation characterized by one-way communication, in which the government or policy actors convey information to the public without providing adequate mechanisms for citizens to provide feedback or influence the decision-making process. At this stage, public presence is often positioned as a procedural fulfillment of participation, rather than a form of substantive involvement in policy governance.

The findings of this study indicate that the informing pattern is still the most dominant approach in efforts to prevent online gambling in Bojonegoro Regency. The role of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, particularly through religious counselors and leaders, is mostly manifested in the dissemination of normative messages regarding the prohibition of online gambling and its moral implications. This information is disseminated through various religious forums, such as regular recitations, Friday sermons, religious lectures, and digital content based on religious preaching. Strategy this contributes to increased normative awareness among the community, but has not been followed by the development of a dialogue space that allows citizens to actively share their experiences, concerns, or prevention initiatives. This limitation is reflected in the statement of one religious teacher who emphasized that community participation is still limited to receiving information:

“Until now, the community has only been at the informational level... they just come, sit, and listen.” (Interview, Religious Teacher, November 28, 2025).



Figure 1. Socialization of religious counselors through the Islamic Council

Source: Personal documentation 2025

This statement shows that the outreach process emphasizes message transmission rather than two-way interaction. In Arnstein's perspective, this condition reflects symbolic participation, where the community is formally involved but is not given the space to influence the direction or strategy of the policy. This view is reinforced by the community's perspective, which confirms that their involvement in online gambling prevention activities is still passive. Although the community attends and participates in various religious activities, they do not have adequate space to discuss or play an active role in the planning and implementation of prevention efforts.



DOI : <https://doi.org/10.24076/58p62p39>

Ramandani et.all, *Public Participation Governance in Improving Digital Literacy for The Prevention of Online Gambling in The Ministry of Religious of Bojonegoro Regency* (2026)

“Until now, the community has only played the role of participants... we are only listeners because we generally receive invitations from religious leaders, usually through routine recitations, during Friday prayer sermons, and during religious meetings. We have not been directly involved in prevention efforts.” (Interview, Community, December 1, 2025)

Analytically, these findings show that the mere delivery of information, although important as a foundation for digital literacy and religious morality, is not enough to encourage a shift in participation to a higher level. When the community is not involved in the process of dialogue, reporting, or decision-making, participation tends to be passive and does not result in a sense of ownership of the online gambling prevention program. Thus, the dominant pattern of informing in Bojonegoro does not yet reflect the redistribution of power or empowerment of citizens as emphasized by Arnstein, but still places the community as the object of policy in the governance of online gambling prevention.

Consultation dan Placation

In the consultation and placation indicators proposed by (Arnstein, 1969) participation is characterized by the provision of space for citizens to voice their opinions, share experiences, and communicate complaints or suggestions. At this level, the government formally opens channels such as public meetings, hearings, or consultation forums that appear to accommodate community input. However, such involvement does not automatically translate into meaningful influence over policy outcomes. There is no structural guarantee that the aspirations expressed by citizens will be substantively incorporated into decision-making processes or reflected in final policy decisions.

Although public participation seems to increase procedurally at this stage, the underlying distribution of power remains largely unchanged. Decision-making authority continues to be concentrated in the hands of state actors, while citizens function primarily in an advisory capacity. In the case of online gambling prevention efforts in Bojonegoro Regency, this dynamic is evident in the pattern of limited dialogue and selective consideration of public input. Consequently, consultation and placation operate more as mechanisms of symbolic inclusion rather than instruments of genuine power-sharing, reinforcing existing hierarchical relationships between the government and the community.

The findings of this study indicate that participation through consultation in efforts to mitigate online gambling in Bojonegoro Regency is still limited, uninstitutionalized, and tends to be informal. Extension workers and religious counselors revealed that the community occasionally shared their experiences or complaints related to online gambling, but such communication generally took place outside of official forums and was not facilitated through systematic and ongoing consultation mechanisms. The absence of a safe and structured consultation space has resulted in public participation remaining at a symbolic level and has not developed into a deliberative process that allows for an equal exchange of ideas. This situation is reflected in the statement of one religious counselor who emphasized the limited reach and closed nature of existing consultation practices:

“The challenge is that the reach is not very wide... online gamblers are secretive and unwilling to consult openly, and victims are afraid to report it. Even if there are victims, we usually talk outside the forum, for example, at a coffee shop.” (Interview, Religious Counselor, November 28, 2025)



From a participatory governance perspective, these informal and individual consultation practices indicate that the state has not provided adequate institutional prerequisites for public involvement. The absence of formal mechanisms not only limits the number of citizens who can be involved, but also hinders the accumulation of public aspirations into input. structured policy. As a result, consultations have had little impact on the formulation and evaluation of online gambling prevention policies. A similar acknowledgment was made by an official from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, who stated that the approach taken thus far has focused on issuing appeals, without involving the community in the joint decision-making process:

“So far, we have mostly issued appeals... we have not yet reached a joint decision-making mechanism.” (Interview, Ministry of Religious Affairs official, November 30, 2025).



Figure 2. Ministry of Religious Affairs outreach with 178 religious counselors

Source: Bojonegoro Regency Ministry of Religious Affairs website

This statement confirms that public participation is still placed in a position of placcation, where public voices are heard to a limited extent, but control over the policy process and outcomes remains centralized within the bureaucratic structure. In this situation, the public is positioned as a source of information or recipient of policy, rather than as a strategic partner in the governance of online gambling prevention. The practice of placcation is evident when the government selectively opens up spaces for hearing, but does not provide mechanisms that enable the community to influence decisions in a meaningful way. Analytically, this situation has an impact on low levels of public trust and a weak sense of community ownership of online gambling prevention programs. When citizens' aspirations are not integrated into policy, participation tends to be instrumental and unsustainable. Thus, the consultation that took place in Bojonegoro Regency has not been able to improve the bargaining position of the community in the governance of online gambling prevention and still falls into the category of symbolic participation as criticized by Arnstein.



Citizen Power

In the *citizen power* stage of the Ladder of Public Participation developed by Sherry (Arnstein, 1969) the highest level of participation is reflected in the existence of equal partnerships between government and citizens, the delegation of authority, and genuine community control over decision-making processes and policy implementation. At this stage, participation moves beyond symbolic involvement and enters a transformative dimension in which citizens possess real bargaining power, institutional access, and the capacity to shape policy agendas. Communities are not merely consulted or informed; rather, they share responsibility, negotiate priorities, and exercise oversight over public programs.

However, the findings of this study demonstrate that such indicators of citizen power have not yet materialized in the context of online gambling mitigation efforts in Bojonegoro Regency. There is no evidence of shared decision-making authority, formal mechanisms for delegated power, or community-led initiatives that significantly influence policy direction. Instead, strategic control remains concentrated within governmental institutions, while community actors primarily function as recipients of information and participants in limited consultation processes. This condition confirms that the practice of participation in this sector has not progressed to the level of partnership or citizen control envisioned in Arnstein's highest rungs of participation.

One of the main obstacles hindering the development of participation towards empowerment is the absence of a secure, accessible, and institutionalized official reporting system for the community. The absence of this mechanism causes citizens to be reluctant to report online gambling practices, even though they are aware of the social and economic impacts it causes. Concerns about social stigma, potential horizontal conflicts, and uncertainty about legal consequences are factors that limit the community's courage to actively participate. This condition shows that low participation is not caused by community apathy, but by weak institutional design that guarantees the safety and protection of participants. This situation is reflected in the following statement from a community informant:

"I think this is a personal matter... I am also worried that something undesirable might happen, and I don't know the reporting procedure."
(Interview, Community, December 1, 2025)

This acknowledgment is reinforced by statements from Ministry of Religious Affairs officials who admit that, to date, there are no policies or reporting systems specifically designed to support public involvement in the prevention of online gambling:

"We have not developed an online reporting system or specific policies to implement this online gambling prevention program... People are sometimes reluctant to talk specifically about online gambling because they are afraid of being reported or arrested." (Interview, Ministry of Religious Affairs Official, November 30, 2025)

From a participatory governance perspective, the absence of clear and secure reporting mechanisms indicates that the state has not provided the structural prerequisites for the realization of citizen power. Without guarantees of protection and clear procedures, public participation carries high risks for citizens and tends to be avoided, so that control over policy remains centralized in the hands of bureaucratic actors.



In addition to reporting aspects, limited participation is also reflected in program evaluation mechanisms. Research findings show that evaluations of online gambling prevention are still conducted internally and rely heavily on narrative reports from religious counselors, without involving the community as part of the policy effectiveness assessment process. As a result, the perspectives of citizens as those directly affected are not systematically accommodated in the policy cycle.

“No evaluations are conducted through surveys or special tools... most are done through communication with religious counselors.” (Interview, Ministry of Religious Affairs Official, November 30, 2025)

This condition confirms that the community does not yet have a formal space to conduct public oversight or provide feedback on program performance. In Arnstein's framework, the absence of community involvement in evaluation indicates that the policy process is still under the full control of institutions, so that participation has not yet developed into partnership or citizen control.

However, the findings also indicate that there is potential for participation that has not been optimally utilized. The community has expressed its readiness to become more actively involved if supported by clear policies, adequate training programs, and the availability of safe and inclusive spaces for dialogue and reporting. This indicates that the main barriers to participation lie in structural and institutional factors, rather than low public awareness or concern.

“Perhaps through training and if there is a clear system... so that we know the procedures and are not afraid.” (Interview, Community, December 1, 2025)

Analytically, these findings confirm that limited information dissemination and consultation are not sufficient to encourage meaningful public participation. To achieve citizen power, the Ministry of Religious Affairs must transform its role from a conveyor of moral messages to a facilitator of participatory partnerships. Strengthening religious-based digital literacy, providing inclusive deliberative forums, developing participatory and secure reporting systems, and involving the community in program evaluation are key prerequisites for shifting participation from mere formality to citizen empowerment in efforts to mitigate online gambling. Several inter-informant analyses revealed the following participation patterns:

Tabel 2. Informant Participation Patterns

No.	informant	Form of participation	Arnstein level
1.	Religious Counselor	One-way information, limited consultation	Tokenism (Informing-Consultation)
2.	Ministry of Religion Officials	appeals, minimal consultation, bureaucratic decisions	Tokenism (Placation)
3.	Public	Passive participants, do not influence policy	Tokenism (Informing-Consultation)

Source: Primary data processed by the author (2026)



The table shows that all informants are still at the symbolic participation level in Arnstein's framework. Religious counselors tend to convey information in a one-way manner, so that the community is only a recipient without being able to influence the process. Ministry of Religious Affairs officials are at the appeasement level because even though they provide limited advice and consultation, decisions are still controlled by the bureaucracy. Community involvement is limited to receiving information and occasionally providing views when asked. Overall, public participation in the prevention of online gambling is still symbolic and has not reached the stage of empowerment that has a real impact on citizens.

The results of the study show that Arnstein's criticism of tokenism is still relevant in efforts to prevent online gambling. Participation is considered important, but in practice it is still limited to the dissemination of information without involving citizens in decision-making. Dominant one-way communication hinders the development of trust and collaboration. In Bojonegoro, this condition is evident in the absence of clear reporting mechanisms, lack of dialogue, and an approach that is still institution-centered, leaving the community passive. As a result, the mitigation process does not include empowerment. This study emphasizes the need for a secure reporting system, community forums at the village level, community involvement in program design, increased digital literacy, and cross-sector collaboration. With these steps, public participation has the potential to shift from mere formality to a more equal partnership.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the governance of public participation in mitigating online gambling in Bojonegoro Regency through the role of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and the results show that community participation is still at a symbolic level as described in Arnstein's Ladder of Participation. The dissemination of information through social media, religious counseling forums, and various initiatives facilitated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs has increased public awareness of the dangers of online gambling, but has not yet encouraged meaningful involvement in the decision-making process or the formation of shared responsibility. In response to the research question, the findings show that community involvement is still dominated by one-way communication (informing) and symbolic participation (tokenism), while indicators of citizen power have not been realized, not because of low public awareness, but because of the lack of systematically developed participatory mechanisms. Therefore, this study recommends that the Ministry of Religious Affairs not only act as a conveyor of moral messages, but also as a facilitator of public participation capable of bridging religious values with digital literacy through the provision of inclusive deliberative forums, strengthening the critical capacity of the community, and developing a participatory reporting system that is safe and easily accessible. The limitations of this study lie in its scope, which is limited to Bojonegoro Regency, and its use of a qualitative approach. Therefore, further research is recommended to use a longitudinal or cross-regional approach and mixed methods to enrich the understanding of the dynamics of public participation in mitigating online gambling.

Acknowledgment

The author expresses sincere appreciation to the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Bojonegoro Regency, the religious counselors who participated in the interviews, and the community members who generously shared their insights and experiences throughout the research process.



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