

## INDONESIAN MUSLIM WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL CONTESTATIONS:

### Challenges to Gender Mainstreaming Policy in The 2019 Elections

*Bani Syarif Maula*

Islamic State Institute of Purwokerto  
email: banisyarifm@iainpurwokerto.ac.id

**Abstract:** *Achieving equal opportunities between women and men in political competition has always been a complex process, even though the government has established affirmative policies to encourage a greater role for women in the political sphere. The issue of patriarchal culture and the challenge of religious conservatism can hamper the achievement of the objectives of the affirmation policy for women in competing for elections to occupy the position of parliament members (DPR-RI). This paper discusses the political contestation of women in reaching political positions as people's representatives and the challenges they face in fighting for issues of gender equality in the parliament. This research answers what factors are hampering women's involvement in political contestation, and what challenges are there in fighting for gender equality issues. This study used a qualitative method with a descriptive analysis approach. The theory used in this study was the concept of affirmative action and the theory of gender equality in politics. The results of the discussion showed that the number of women elected in the 2019 Elections increased. Thanks to the affirmative policy ruled by the Indonesian government. However, affirmative policies to meet gender quotas do not only benefit those who have gender equality agendas, but also those who stand with the anti-feminist movement that represents the voices of conservative groups. The issue they are fighting for is still trapped in the gender ideology proclaimed*

*by a patriarchal culture, which assumes women's problems are identical to those of mothers. Therefore, not all elected women MPs explicitly have a gender perspective.*

**Keywords:** women, gender, politics, Indonesia, Islam.

**الملخص:** إن تحقيق تكافؤ الفرص بين النساء والرجال في المنافسة السياسية كان دائماً عملية معقدة ، على الرغم من أن الدولة وضعت سياسات إيجابية لتشجيع دور أكبر للمرأة في المجال السياسي. يمكن أن تعوق مسألة الثقافة الأبوية وتحدي المحافظة الدينية تحقيق أهداف سياسة التأكيد للمرأة في التنافس على الانتخابات لشغل منصب أعضاء البرلمان (مجلس النواب لجمهورية إندونيسيا). تناقش هذه الورقة التنافس السياسي للمرأة في الوصول إلى المناصب السياسية كمثلة للشعب والتحديات التي تواجهها في الكفاح من أجل قضايا المساواة بين الجنسين في البرلمان. يجب هذا البحث عن العوامل التي تعوق مشاركة المرأة في التنافس السياسي ، والتحديات التي تواجهها النساء في الكفاح من أجل قضايا المساواة بين الجنسين. تستخدم هذه الدراسة طريقة نوعية مع نهج التحليل الوصفي. النظرية المستخدمة في هذه الدراسة هي مفهوم العمل الإيجابي ونظرية المساواة بين الجنسين في السياسة. تظهر نتائج البحث أن عدد النساء المنتخبات في انتخابات ٢٠١٢ زاد بنسبة ٢٢ في المائة. بفضل السياسة الإيجابية التي تحكمها الحكومة الإندونيسية. ومع ذلك ، فإن السياسات الإيجابية للوفاء بحصص النوع الاجتماعي لا تفيد فقط أولئك الذين لديهم أجنحة للمساواة بين الجنسين ، ولكن أيضاً أولئك الذين يقفون إلى جانب الحركة المناهضة للنسوية التي تمثل أصوات الجماعات المحافظة. إن القضية التي يناضلون من أجلها لا تزال عالقة في الأيديولوجية الجنسانية التي أعلنتها ثقافة أبوية ، والتي تفترض أن مشاكل المرأة مماثلة لمشاكل الأمهات. لذلك ، لم يكن لجميع البرلمانيات المنتخبات منظور جنساني بشكل واضح.

**Abstrak:** *Mencapai peluang yang setara antara perempuan dan laki-laki dalam persaingan politik selalu menjadi proses yang kompleks, meskipun negara telah menetapkan kebijakan afirmatif untuk mendorong peran yang lebih besar bagi perempuan dalam ranah politik. Persoalan budaya patriarkal dan tantangan konservatisme agama dapat menghambat pencapaian tujuan kebijakan afirmasi bagi perempuan dalam memperebutkan pemilihan untuk menduduki posisi anggota DPR-RI. Kajian ini membahas kontestasi politik perempuan dalam mencapai*

*posisi sebagai wakil rakyat dan tantangan yang mereka hadapi dalam memperjuangkan isu-isu kesetaraan gender di parlemen. Penelitian ini menjawab faktor-faktor apa yang menghambat keterlibatan perempuan dalam kontestasi politik, dan tantangan apa yang dihadapi perempuan dalam memperjuangkan isu kesetaraan gender. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis deskriptif. Teori yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah konsep affirmative action dan teori kesetaraan gender dalam politik. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa jumlah perempuan yang terpilih dalam Pemilu 2019 meningkat 22 persen berkat kebijakan afirmatif yang ditetapkan oleh pemerintah. Namun demikian, kebijakan afirmatif untuk memenuhi kuota perempuan tidak hanya menguntungkan mereka yang memiliki agenda kesetaraan gender, tetapi juga mereka yang mendukung gerakan anti-feminis yang mewakili suara-suara kelompok konservatif. Masalah yang mereka perjuangkan masih terjebak dalam ideologi gender yang diproklamasikan oleh budaya patriarki, yang menganggap masalah perempuan identik dengan masalah ibu. Karena itu, tidak semua anggota parlemen perempuan yang terpilih secara eksplisit memiliki perspektif gender.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Indonesia has made many achievements in laws and policies, such as institutional change and increased understanding of accountability to implement the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Policies that support women are needed to increase women's participation in politics. The 2019 elections stipulated in the Indonesian Law No. 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections encourage and provide space for women. The 2019 election is a very strategic momentum, especially in efforts to improve the quality of women's representation in politics to develop an awareness of rights and obligations. Affirmative action has been carried out through legal instruments, but the level of women's electability in parliament has never reached a minimum of 30%. Some academics, feminists, and activists believe that overcoming the lack of representation of women both in parliament and in political parties is the key to advancing women's interests

in the development of Indonesia. For more than a decade, Indonesia has implemented a gender quota rule that requires political parties to submit a minimum of 30% women candidates in the legislative nomination. As a strategy to improve women's share in the Indonesian parliament, gender quotas were introduced in 2002 and first implemented in the 2004 elections. Several civil society groups worked hard to encourage political parties to fulfill the quota. In 2004, the number of women candidates was only 11%, which had risen significantly to 17.86% in 2009, and fell slightly to 17.32% in 2014.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, data from the House of Representatives shows that of lawmakers serving in the 2014-2019 period, only 97 of 506 members are women, totaling 17 percent, which was a slight fall from 103 women in the previous period.<sup>2</sup>

Entering politics is not an easy thing for women, even though there is already a policy on affirmation in nominating legislative candidates, namely political parties must nominate at least 30 percent for women legislative candidates. The policy has been seen as an affirmative policy to encourage greater involvement of women in politics. The existence of women legislators is considered important because it can play a role in discussing gender perspective regulations. An example is the Draft Bill on the Elimination of Sexual Violence that emerged from the initiative of women's legislators along with several activists. However, now all political parties still have the same paradigm, which is to gain as many votes as possible for the House of Representatives (DPR) seats. Affirmations to promote women in parliament are not a priority.

In the present, women's representation in the DPR is still low. The portion is only 17 percent from the 2014 election. Several factors are the cause of the low number of women parliamentarians. These factors include, among others, political parties having difficulty finding potential women candidates to win legislative elections. Besides, another factor is the difficulty of women being elected to the legislative seats because they are hampered by culture, religion, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Ella Prihatini, "On The Same Page? Support for Gender Quotas among Indonesian Lawmakers," *Asian Social Science* 14, no. 15 (2008): 48–59.

<sup>2</sup> Liza Yosephine, "Cultural Barriers Hamper Women's Political Participation: UN Women," *The Jakarta Post*, May 20, 2016, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/05/20/cultural-barriers-hamper-womens-political-participation-un-women.html>.

social. Also, women find it difficult to obtain a place in parliament because they lack political training, social capital, and campaign funds. Another factor is women who prioritize families over political careers because of their gender roles. Another factor is that women consider politics to be a world of men and a dirty world full of corruption.<sup>3</sup>

The rise of identity politics and political Islam, especially since the 2017 Jakarta Governor Election, presents new problems for feminists and anyone who supports affirmative policies for women in political contestation in Indonesia. Now feminists face new challenges from the religious conservative women's movement which actively and intensively attacks feminism from within the system. In the 2019 Election, it appears that the influence of anti-feminist women candidates began to emerge. They have leadership skills that are very good, clever and articulate in conveying arguments, and vigorously campaigning at the grassroots level. Feminists must be prepared to emulate their narrative because these candidates and activists affiliated with these anti-feminist women candidates will have a major influence in policy discourse if they succeed in passing to the parliament.

This paper discusses the political contestation of women in reaching political positions as people's representatives and the challenges they face in fighting for issues of gender equality in the Indonesian parliament. This research answers what factors are hampering women's involvement in political contestation, and what challenges are women in fighting for gender equality issues. This study used a qualitative method with a descriptive analysis approach. The theory used in this study is the concept of affirmative action and the theory of gender equality in politics. This paper aims to discuss factors of the failure of women to achieve the 30 percent quota in the parliament, by looking at how women's status in social structure, which is based on religious beliefs, influences the involvement of women in political activities. This paper also discusses the emergence of anti-feminist movement among politicians that are affiliated to Islamist ideology, which struggles to maintain the ideology of Islamism to implement a traditional Islamic legal system to modern Indonesian society.

---

<sup>3</sup> Prihatini, "Support for Gender Quotas among Indonesian Lawmakers."

## **GENDER MAINSTREAMING POLICY FOR WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION**

Gender mainstreaming emerges in national and international processes of governance of public policy to mainstream considerations about gender inequality across a range of policy areas. It is closely associated with international efforts by the United Nations system to promote gender awareness and fight discrimination and violence against women.<sup>4</sup> The political aims of gender mainstreaming are to free women from 'symbolic annihilation', which takes place through the silencing of women's voices and the absence of women from public life and their repression in the private sphere.<sup>5</sup>

The right of women to participate in public life on an equal basis with men is inscribed in international standards and conventions such as article 25 of the ICCPR, Article 7 of the CEDAW, and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), which have suggested government and civil society to use special measures to increase the number of women in politics, administration, and judiciary. Equal access of men and women to justice, power, decision-making, and leadership at all levels is a key indicator of citizenship and equality, which is a necessary precondition for the proper functioning of democracy.<sup>6</sup> This more recent emphasis on gender sensitivity illustrates how the definition and focus of gender research and policy development have shifted beyond a needs-based agenda, to explore the extent to which gender encompasses the "socially constructed roles, relationships, and expectations of women and men and the ways that these are reinforced by educational, political, economic, and cultural systems."<sup>7</sup>

In the Indonesian context, the number of Indonesian women's participation in political life has been a long-standing concern in a democratic society. Although the percentage of women officeholders

---

<sup>4</sup> Khofifah Indar Parawansa, "Enhancing Women's Political Participation in Indonesia," in *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2005), 82.

<sup>5</sup> Katharine Sarikakis, "Power, Patriarchy, Profit: Barriers to Gender Mainstreaming in Media Policy," in *Media and Gender: A Scholarly Agenda for the Global Alliance on Media and Gender* (Paris: UNESCO, 2014), 66–69.

<sup>6</sup> Shireen Hassim, "From Presence to Power: Women's Citizenship in a New Democracy," *Agenda* 40 (1999): 6–17.

<sup>7</sup> Fiona Martin and Gerard Goggin, "Digital Transformations?: Gendering the End User in Digital Government Policy," *Journal of Information Policy* 6 (2016): 436–59.

has generally increased since the mid-20th century, women remain underrepresented due to various factors: political, socio economic, and cultural. Women members of parliament are not an exception.<sup>8</sup> Women's right to vote and stand for parliament has existed since the first Indonesian election in 1955 but has not resulted in significant numbers of women in parliament.<sup>9</sup> The low representation of women in the legislative bodies at the national level was challenged by Indonesian women after a long struggle, which resulted in a provision of a 30 percent non-compulsory quota included in the General Election Law (Law No. 12/2003). Later, the provisions of the law were amended in Law No. 10/2008, which has become compulsory to meet the quota of 30% of women in legislative candidates, both at the district and provincial as well as national levels.

The history of representation in the Indonesian Parliament is one of the long processes of women's struggles in the public sphere. For centuries, men dominated almost every aspect of public life with their patriarchal values, which were very often considered natural, as they perceived that the role of women was to manage the household. This sociological fact is one of the obstacles faced by Indonesian women gaining access to political institutions, which makes them always under-represented in the Indonesian Parliament throughout Indonesian history. After the fall of President Suharto in 1998, the nature of political life changed dramatically, in which political life was a mixture of turmoil, hope, and uncertainty as the state became weaker and civil society flourished in neighborhoods as grassroots "in all kinds of admirable and repulsive ways, a mixture of mushrooms and toadstools bursting out of the debris of the authoritarian state".<sup>10</sup>

Freedom of association was enjoyed by women and men, but women in particular soon began to feel the lack of state services and control of law and order.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, even though women, along with men counterparts, enjoyed political freedom in the more democratic

---

<sup>8</sup> Priscilla Offenbauer, "Women In Islamic Societies: A Selected Review of Social Scientific Literature," *A Report Prepared by the Federal Research Division* (Library of Congress, 2005), 12.

<sup>9</sup> Wahidah Zein Siregar, "Parliamentary Representation of Women in Indonesia: The Struggle for a Quota," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 11, no. 3 (2005): 36–72.

<sup>10</sup> Susan Blackburn, *Women and the State in Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Blackburn.

political situation, representation of women remains low in the Parliament and other political institutions at the local, provincial and national levels. Even though, there are no more ‘political taboo’ and formal legal barriers that prevent women from taking part in decision making and women’s social and economic position has gradually improved, very often women who want to enter politics find that the political and public environment is not conducive to their participation, besides cultural and social reasons. Women still feel that it is quite difficult for them to enter the public political arena and to articulate their needs and concerns to the state.<sup>12</sup> This condition makes the number of women in elected positions remains low.

The rule about the compulsory 30 percent quota for women candidates is one of the important achievements in the course of post-reform Indonesia’s democracy. This rule is contained in several laws, namely Law No. 31 of 2002 concerning Political Parties, Law No. 12 of 2003 concerning General Elections, Law No. 2 of 2008 concerning Political Parties, and Law No. 10 of 2008 concerning General Elections of Members of the DPR and DPRD.

Law No. 12 of 2003 introduced a non-compulsory quota, in which political parties were asked to nominate 30 percent women in their lists of parliamentary candidates at all levels. Although this was not imperative, and also it contained no provisions about the position of women on party lists, many parties attempted to fulfill the requirement to propose 30 percent women candidates in their lists for elected bodies at all levels. However, there are still many problems concerning the comprehensive implementation of the quota regulation. The greatest obstacles are due to the institutional design of the electoral system, the structure of political parties and gender ideology.<sup>13</sup>

Law No. 2 of 2008 regulates political parties to include a minimum representation of 30 women in the management structure of party organizations at the central level. This 30 percent figure is based on the results of the United Nations study stating that a minimum amount of 30 percent allows for a change and impacts on

---

<sup>12</sup> Blackburn, 104.

<sup>13</sup> The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Gender Development Research Institute, “Women’s Quotas: How to Introduce and Implement Them Better?,” *Seminar and Workshop for Southeast Asia* (Bangkok, Thailand, June 2007).



the quality of decisions taken in public institutions.<sup>14</sup> Besides, Law No. 10 of 2008 requires political parties to include 30 percent of women's representation in the central level management structure. These conditions must be met by political parties so they can participate in the General Election. Another regulation related to women's representation is contained in Law No. 10 of 2008 Article 55 paragraph 2 that regulates the application of a zipper system, that is, every 3 candidates for the legislature, there is at least one candidate member of woman legislature.

Although women's representation in politics has been encouraged through various policies, the results are still far from expectations. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) data, at the ASEAN level, Indonesia is ranked sixth concerning women's representation in parliament. While at the international level, Indonesia's position is ranked 89th out of 168 countries, far below Afghanistan, Vietnam, Timor Leste and Pakistan.<sup>15</sup> The low representation of women in the political sphere in Indonesia can be explained by looking at a patriarchal system that still dominates the culture of society. This has led to gender disparities and gender inequalities that affect various aspects of social life.<sup>16</sup>

## CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS BARRIERS

Roberta Clarke, UN Women's regional director for Asia and the Pacific, said that family barriers proved to be the most prominent factor. Such cases directly concern gender expectations and stereotypes, which must be transformed. However, Clarke also conveyed optimism on Indonesia's ability to tackle inequality in political participation.<sup>17</sup> This is due to the changing political situation in Indonesia, which is increasingly democratic by upholding the

---

<sup>14</sup> United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, "Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes, with Particular Emphasis on Political Participation and Leadership," *Report of the Expert Group Meeting* (Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia, October 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Scholastica Gerintya, "Periksa Data: Kuota 30% Perempuan Di Parlemen Belum Pernah Tercapai," *Tirto.Id*, September 7, 2017, <https://tirto.id/kuota-30-perempuan-di-parlemen-belum-pernah-tercapai-cv8q>.

<sup>16</sup> Alfian Rokhmansyah, *Pengantar Gender Dan Feminisme: Pemahaman Awal Kritik Sastra Feminisme* (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Garudhawaca, 2016), 10.

<sup>17</sup> Yosephine, "Cultural Barriers Hamper Women's Political Participation: UN Women."

values of gender equality. The backwardness of women in political participation is the reason for the adoption of the affirmative action policy. Affirmative action is a policy that takes into account geography, race, ethnic, gender, disability, and other disadvantaged backgrounds. This is a way of compensating past injustices.<sup>18</sup>

Democratization gives women new important opportunities to act as citizens of a democratic state.<sup>19</sup> For Indonesian women, this opportunity came when Suharto's authoritarian, patriarchal regime ended its power in 1998, and Indonesia began a new process of democratic transition. Indonesian women had to define their roles, citizenship, and participation in a more democratic government, tasks largely met through their vigorous social-movement activism. As a democratic country, Indonesia's Constitution guarantees equality before the law, equal protection of the law, and enjoyment of equal rights and obligations for its entire citizens. However, gender disparities and gender inequalities that lead to discrimination persist in practice. This is caused, among other things, by cultural and religious barriers that prevent women from taking part in political life. The West perceives Muslim women in the Islamic world to be downgraded and oppressed. Most western or secular feminist analysts and the Islamic feminists' counterpart considered Islam as a major setback to women's political participation, and consequently against gender equality.<sup>20</sup>

Indonesia is a large and extraordinarily diverse country, with about three hundred ethnic groups, whose culture is largely dominated by patriarchal culture. Concerning religious life, most of the major world religions are represented in Indonesia, besides local religions and animistic beliefs.<sup>21</sup> Among these faiths, Islam constitutes about 87 percent of the population; making it the largest religious group in the country, and dominating people's lives considerably.<sup>22</sup> Moreover,

---

<sup>18</sup> Francis Beckwith and Todd E. Jones, *Affirmative Action: Social Justice Or Reverse Discrimination?* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1997), 9.

<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Martyn, *The Women's Movement in Post-Colonial Indonesia: Gender and Nation in a New Democracy* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Mahmudad Olawunmi Muhibbu-Din, "Feminism and Modern Islamic Politics: The Fact and the Fallacy," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 15 (2009): 44–59.

<sup>21</sup> Blackburn, *Women and the State in Modern Indonesia*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Benyamin Fleming Intan, "*Public Religion*" and the *Pancasila-Based State of Indonesia: An Ethical and Sociological Analysis* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 31.

Indonesia is culturally very different from the Middle East or West or South Asia, particularly related to a tradition of greater freedom for women in public places.<sup>23</sup>

Social and political dominance with patriarchal culture is a feature of Indonesian society. Patriarchal society, along with its culture and tradition, dominates most of the Indonesian society in general. Some regions have a matriarchal culture, but the number is very small, for example, is Minangkabau (West Sumatra).<sup>24</sup> However, the traditionalist culture of Indonesians coupled with Islamic teachings spread throughout the nation. The cultural hegemony and Islamic traditional Indonesian society happen because of political supports, formal education system and the media. Traditionalist and Islamic values, views, and lifestyle have become the source and standard reference for many of the ideals and values of the larger community, not to mention the entire modern Indonesian society.<sup>25</sup> In the Islamic view, women's destiny is primarily centered on a women's role as wife and mother. Moreover, there is a common cultural justification for women's subordination in Indonesian culture where women (wives) are defined as a "background companion" or the better one "the companion at the husband's side".<sup>26</sup> This maxim reminds them that women's role is to sit behind her husband (both a literal and figurative custom) and support him as he needs. This gender conception has remained unchanged and even reinforced by Islam. Many Indonesian Muslims believe that according to Qur'an Surah al-Nisā' verse 34 if women (wives) fail to respect this obligation; men (husbands) have the right to beat them.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, Indonesian society, in general, is influenced dominantly by the Javanese culture, which is supported by traditional Islamic traditions and the state's intervention in determining people's gender roles. The influence of traditionalist culture, religious beliefs and state's gender ideology,

---

<sup>23</sup> Susan Blackburn, "Indonesian Women and Political Islam," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 39, no. 1 (2008): 83–105.

<sup>24</sup> Joke Schrijvers and Els Postel-Coster, "Minangkabau Women: Change in a Matrilineal Society," *Archipel* 13 (1977): 79–103.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Van Bruinessen, "Global and Local in Indonesian Islam," *Southeast Asian Studies (Kyoto)* 37, no. 2 (1999): 46–63.

<sup>26</sup> Kathryn Robinson, *Gender, Islam and Democracy in Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2009), 71.

<sup>27</sup> Clarissa Adamson, "Gendered Anxieties: Islam, Women's Rights, and Moral Hierarchy in Java," *Anthropological Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (2007): 5–37.

in which their patriarchal value systems predominantly discriminate against women, are responsible for the continuing considerable influence of this ideal in the way it subordinates women to men.

The perceptions of women among Indonesian Muslims, in general, have been influenced by various elements. One of them is the influence of medieval traditions in interpreting Islamic precepts and teaching. Many Muslims believe that women are regarded as carnal temptations, for the mythical Eve was constructed as the seducer. The root of the devaluation of women has its source from the belief that Eve was created from Adam's left rib. Influenced by Islamic medieval traditions and Javanese culture, many Indonesian Muslims perceive that, unlike men, women are unable to have spiritual power due to their role as mothers and servile wives. It is considered that only males who have the potency to achieve spiritual power and thus attain a refined life. In the tradition of Java, since childhood, women are trained to be submissive wives rather than mothers.<sup>28</sup> Women in the medieval Islamic world believe that a good woman is one whose place is in the home, being a loyal, submissive and supportive wife, handling the domestic chores and being responsible for the children; women often appear invisible in what is widely perceived as the male-oriented society of Islam.<sup>29</sup>

The idea of a good woman in Islamic tradition is then entrenched in the Indonesian Marriage law No. 1/1974, article 31, as mentioned above, which divides men's and women's jobs into two rigid areas, the public and private domain. Moreover, as the Islamic rules allow polygamy, the Indonesian Marriage Law also does in articles 3, 4 and 5. In this regard, many Indonesian Muslim scholars mirror traditionalist tradition of the country, because one of the social signs of power, according to Anderson, is fertility, the traditionalist culture holds that the possession of a woman is considered a natural attribute of power.<sup>30</sup> To evince women's role as wives and mothers living in the private domain, which is, of course, subordinate status to men, many Indonesian traditional Muslim scholars argue by focusing on

---

<sup>28</sup> Bani Syarif Maula, "Indonesian Muslim Women: Between Culture, Religion, and Politics," *Ijtima'iyah: Journal of Muslim Society Research* 1, no. 1 (2016): 113–31.

<sup>29</sup> Gavin R.G. Hambly, *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, ed. Gavin R.G. Hambly (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 16.

<sup>30</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Language, and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), 2.

a Qur'anic text Sura al-Nisā' verse 34. From the official Indonesian translation of the Qur'an,<sup>31</sup> the passage reads:

Men are the leaders (*qawwamūn*) of women, because Allah has blessed them (men) with more than women and because they (men) spend their wealth on women. Because of this, virtuous women are those who obey Allah and restrain themselves when they are without their husbands because Allah will protect them. Women who you fear defy you [their husband], admonish them, separate yourself from their bed and beat them (*ḍaraba*).

Many Muslims in Indonesia believe that this verse prescribes that men are the leaders (*qawwām*) of women. Their argument is also supported by *hadiths*, which are usually cited and interpreted literally to keep women stay at the home. One of the *hadiths* stipulates that “women should have their husband’s permission if they want to go out of their houses into the public world because women’s appropriate place is in the domestic domain”.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, female sexuality, for many Muslims’ perceptions, is seen as being more powerful and destructive than that of a man and is identified as *fitna* or chaos. Therefore, according to them, women must be controlled to prevent men from being distracted from their social and religious duties. Another *hadith*, which is very popular and always cited by Indonesian conservative Muslim scholars, even stipulates that “people would not be prosperous if ruled by a woman” (in Arabic: *lan yufliḥa qaum wallau amrahum imra’ah*).<sup>33</sup>

Under Indonesian culture, supported by a literalist interpretation of Islamic prescriptions, Indonesian women were not appropriate to get involved and play a role in political life. Traditional Indonesian women were not accustomed to playing a part in politics and had never been encouraged to do so. Politics appeared to be a man’s world in which women did not feel at ease and for which they had no training. However, in recent years, in the period following the

---

<sup>31</sup> The standard of Indonesian translation of the Qur’an is officially translated and published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

<sup>32</sup> Masdar Farid Mas’udi, “Perempuan Di Antara Lembaran Kitab Kuning,” in *Islam Indonesia Dalam Kajian Tekstual Dan Kontekstual* (Jakarta: Indonesia-Netherlands Cooperation in Islamic Studies, 1993), 158.

<sup>33</sup> Robinson, *Gender, Islam and Democracy in Indonesia*; Mas’udi, “Perempuan Di Antara Lembaran Kitab Kuning.”

demise of the Suharto regime, the opportunity to express political rights have been opened much wider than before, in line with growing awareness about human rights in general. With the rise of an educated middle class, improved communications with the rest of the world and pressure from aid donors, the legitimacy of rights discourse grew in this country.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, at the same time, there has been a growing number of women's movements, which makes several women's groups more active through the process of struggling for democratic rights to achieve the needs of women. The women's movement is essential to achieve a more gender-equal society, both in theory and in practice. Through women's movements, Indonesian women are expected to get significant achievements and women would be able to do many things for positive social changes, as far as women's rights are concerned. Many urban women are now educated and able to work outside the home. More women hold good positions in government offices and their proportion increases continuously. Education among women is widespread, employment is also more accessible, and more legal instruments will protect women's rights. This condition may provide more space and opportunities for women to represent their needs and interests than in previous times.

This achievement has improved conditions and opportunities for many women, particularly those of the middle and higher class. The women's movement has also engaged in collective action that has changed policies and decision-making structures, so that they may better address issues of gender discrimination.

In addition to the political, the reinterpretation of Islamic law regarding women's rights among the younger generation of Indonesian Muslims becomes more prevalent. There is a current tendency among younger moderate Muslims to move in a more progressive direction in gender activism in Indonesia. This trend has emerged as a result of changing local, national, and global socio-political influences, particularly the rise of progressive Muslim ideas in Indonesia. Based on the vision of making the Islamic religious interpretation more egalitarian and emancipatory, formulated by these activists, the shift has made Islamic texts more dynamic through a constructive dialogue with contemporary human reality which in turn put an agenda of socio-cultural transformation into real activism.

---

<sup>34</sup> Blackburn, *Women and the State in Modern Indonesia*.

The Indonesian moderate Muslims believe how Islam provides an important place for women in the community and guarantees their rights. By referring to the sources of Islamic law, Muslim women intellectuals and activists search for and develop strategies to challenge inequalities in their societies, question women's status in Muslim societies and provide an alternative concept of women's rights in Islam. They also endorse and promote women's participation in the public sphere, particularly participation in decision-making processes. By doing this, according to Cooke, Muslim women are constructing a cosmopolitan identity with local roots that unites them in a shared culture, diffused by education and modernization, because Indonesian women, along with women from other countries, are increasingly aware of connections among their experiences and those of Muslim women elsewhere.<sup>35</sup>

The growing number of moderate Muslim women's organizations is not without challenges. The movements of radical Muslims have also been more intense since democratization in the freer political climate after the Suharto regime, as already explained above. However, in the more democratic political atmosphere, many women's organizations, along with human rights groups, also oppose any regulation that restricts the autonomy of women in public lives and challenges those regional regulations that limit women's rights by judicial review.

## **CHALLENGES TO MUSLIM WOMEN'S POLITICAL ACTIVITIES**

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy that makes women's and men's interests and experiences an integral component of the process of formulation, implementation, monitoring and assessment of legal acts, policies, projects and measures in political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life and that aims to eliminate inequality between women and men.<sup>36</sup> To ensure gender equality and prevent discrimination against women at political contestation, a gender

---

<sup>35</sup> Miriam Cooke, "Deploying the Muslim woman," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 24, no. 1 (2008): 91–99.

<sup>36</sup> Gender Equality Commission, "Activities Promoting Gender Mainstreaming at the National Level in Council of Europe Member States," 2017, <https://rm.coe.int/gender-mainstreaming-in-the-ms/168075df2c>.

policy component was introduced into the state law. Indonesia has joined almost all gender-related international legal instruments. As a member of the United Nations, it has undertaken certain commitments not only concerning ratifying the most important international legal instruments, but also to bring the national legislation in line with the provisions of those instruments. A significant policy promoting women's involvement in Indonesian political activities is the law concerning the General Election (the most recent one is Law No. 7 of 2017). The law is based on a gender mainstreaming program as a major global strategy for ensuring gender equality.

The law mandates that legislative candidates proposed by political parties must contain a representation of women at least 30% (thirty percent). This ruling forces women candidates to compete openly with men candidates and negates the hard-fought gains for equal opportunity with men in political life. As women candidates are disadvantaged by several factors, especially cultural, religious and economic factors, this means they must work harder than men to be elected. Women's lack of access to funds and control over the political party machinery that would help them in running successful campaigns is another challenge for women's candidates to win seats in the parliament.<sup>37</sup>

The Association for Elections and Democracy (Perludem) said that in the 2019 legislative elections (DPR), 118 seats or 21 percent of the total 575 seats in the DPR were filled by women. That number increased 22 percent from the previous election which only filled as many as 97 seats. Meanwhile, the number of women elected to the Regional Representative Council (DPD) reached 30.9 percent or 42 women succeeded in occupying the seats of DPD members. From 34 provinces, there are eight provinces where there are no elected candidates for female DPD members, namely Aceh, Bangka Belitung Islands, Riau Islands, Bali, South Kalimantan, Central Sulawesi, West Sulawesi, and West Papua.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Hana A. Satriyo, "The Ongoing Struggle for Women's Political Participation," *In-Asia: Weekly Insight and Features from Asia*, March 11, 2009, <https://asiafoundation.org/2009/03/11/the-ongoing-struggle-for-womens-political-participation/>.

<sup>38</sup> Riyan Setiawan, "Isi Kursi DPR 2019-2024, Porsi Perempuan Meningkat," *Tirto.Id*, September 8, 2019, <https://tirto.id/ehHG>.



Achieving an equal opportunity between women and men in political contestation has always been a complex process. Cultural issues, such as patriarchal culture putting men as the primary decision-makers in the society, could obstruct women's performance in competing for the election. Moreover, the system of open-list proportional representation would also become a difficult task for women because of the expensive nature of the system. However, Indonesia Muslim women could participate in politics because their rights as a citizen are granted and protected by the state. Additionally, the Law of General Election (Law No. 7/2017) provides rules that require political parties to include at least thirty percent of women's representation in the management of central political parties and include a minimum of thirty percent of women in the list of legislative candidates. Therefore, Indonesian women gained a new momentum to push women's involvement in political life. They quickly discovered that people's desires for democracy—when it is understood as equal representation and voice for all—could be leveraged to argue for gender equality. Since then, many Indonesian women became involved in political activism. Many newer organizations led by women have appeared around the country, establishing independent groups dedicated to issues of gender equality and human rights.

The emergence of progressive Muslim women's organizations can be attributed to changing socio-political contexts, at local, national, and global levels. These progressive Muslim women's organizations have articulated their diverse voices and adopted a variety of strategies along a spectrum of traditionalist-progressive, modernist-progressive, and liberal-progressive Islam. They critically engage with Islamic tradition by combining classical Islamic scholarships with humanities and social science approaches. Responding to democratization, they struggle for Islamic legal reform, through cultural, structural, and legal strategies to quest for gender justice and equality. In doing this, they have to face religious-political challenges contributed by Islamic legal conservatism, rising political Islam, and ambivalent state gender policies in contemporary Indonesia.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Nur Hidayah, "Mainstreaming Gender in Contemporary Indonesian Islam: The Challenges of Progressive Muslim Women's Organisations," *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 19, no. 1 (2019).

Democracy and political openness in Indonesia have made many women's organizations play a significant role in political contestation. Many women are participating in political contestation in 2019 by promoting the idea of conservative Islam. The rise of political Islam presents new problems for anyone who supports affirmative policies for women in political contestation in Indonesia. The gender mainstreaming program and affirmative action through state regulation to support women taking part in politics face new challenges from the religious conservative women's movement, which actively and intensively attacks such programs by considering it as an agenda of feminism movement from the West. In the 2019 election, it appears that the influence of anti-feminist women candidates began to emerge.

The idea of the campaign carried out by conservative women candidates includes the Draft Bill on the Elimination of Sexual Violence. These candidates view the draft bill as potentially threatening the nation's morality, and the draft bill may potentially tolerate and present a sense of permissiveness toward free sex culture and LGBT. Another important policy that they highlighted during the legislative election campaign was the revision of the Marriage Law. Responding to the issue of child marriage, feminist activists struggled to increase the minimum legal age of a bride from now, 16 years. Last year, 2018, the Indonesian Constitutional Court declared the 1974 Marriage Act unconstitutional and mandated a revision of the law within three years during the next legislative period. However, for conservative women candidates, under age marriage is considered not problematic because each individual cannot be generalized to their level of physical or psychological maturity. They argued that some of the girls have not reached the age of 18 years but already have physical maturity while having psychological maturity as well; so, according to them, generalizing the minimum age for marriage by reason of "gender equality" is an absurd argument and only follows the international conventions without being able to be critical.<sup>40</sup>

The emergence of increasingly opposing groups of feminism has lately rejected the existence of the Draft Law on the Elimination

---

<sup>40</sup> Dyah Ayu Kartika, "Pemilu 2019: Pintu Masuk Gelombang Baru Anti-Feminisme?," *Tirto.Id*, April 25, 2019, <https://tirto.id/pemilu-2019-pintu-masuk-gelombang-baru-anti-feminisme-dmTq>.

of Sexual Violence (PKS Bill). They united to capture the masses in various ways, including in the 2019 election campaign. The conservative group of women thinks that women should not be equalized with men, but should be glorified. The equalization of men and women in feminism, according to them, is an insult to human nature, because women are forced to follow the nature of men. This group often voiced that to respect the rights of women there is no need to follow feminism. Having full Islam (*kāffah*), according to them, is a way to appreciate God's creatures according to their propriety. The statement of "my body does not belong to me, but belongs to God" is often the point of anti-feminism campaigns in Indonesia around the 2019 elections. The dictum is a challenger to the statement of "my body is my authority" which is often echoed by feminists. This situation is reminiscent of the discussion of the draft marriage law in the 1970s, where conservative Islamic groups forced to include the values of classical Islamic law in the bill.<sup>41</sup>

Increasing the number of women's representation in parliament is an important task. However, it should not be a single focus when analyzing the role of women in politics in Indonesia. Affirmative policies to meet gender quotas do not only benefit those who have a gender equality agenda, but also those who stand with the anti-feminist movement that represents the voices of conservative groups. The emergence of the role of women's groups can be considered as an example of political involvement which is largely self-directed by Indonesian women. However, the issue they are fighting for is still trapped in the gender ideology proclaimed by a patriarchal culture, which assumes women's problems are identical to those of mothers. Therefore, not all elected women MPs explicitly have a gender perspective, some even declare themselves anti-feminist. The patriarchal character in Indonesian political parties and the shifting of society towards a more conservative one, add to the obstacles in the progressive advocacy of gender policies. Thus, the increase in the number of women getting seats in the DPR becomes too simple an indicator to measure the success of the women's movement.

---

<sup>41</sup> Elya Munfarida, "Political Backdrop of the Indonesian Marriage Law of 1974," *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam* 6, no. 1 (2013): 129–42.

## CONCLUSION

Women are still under-represented in political institutions in Indonesia due to cultural and religious reasons. From the cultural perspective, the Indonesian patriarchal society seems to give the duty of representation to men, and women are expected to comply and be content with the traditional gender roles within the family, in which their duties are taking care of the children, the house, and their husbands. Religious reasons also become a deterrent for women who want to involve in political life and become political representatives. Islamic precepts are usually incorporated to uphold the unequal relationship between men and women, in opposition to the quest for gender equality.

Democracy and political openness in Indonesia have made many women's organizations play a role in political contestation. The emergence of progressive Muslim women's organizations can be attributed to changing Indonesian socio-political contexts. However, the rise of political Islam presents new problems for anyone who supports affirmative policies for women in political contestation in Indonesia. Affirmative policies to meet gender quotas do not only benefit those who have gender equality agendas, but also those who stand with the anti-feminist movement that represents the voices of conservative groups. Therefore, those who stand with gender mainstreaming programs have to face religious-political challenges contributed by Islamic legal conservatism.

## REFERENCES

- Adamson, Clarissa. "Gendered Anxieties: Islam, Women's Rights, and Moral Hierarchy in Java." *Anthropological Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (2007): 5–37.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Beckwith, Francis, and Todd E. Jones. *Affirmative Action: Social Justice Or Reverse Discrimination?* New York: Prometheus Books, 1997.

- Blackburn, Susan. "Indonesian Women and Political Islam." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 39, no. 1 (2008): 83–105.
- . *Women and the State in Modern Indonesia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Bruinessen, Martin Van. "Global and Local in Indonesian Islam." *Southeast Asian Studies (Kyoto)* 37, no. 2 (1999): 46–63.
- Cooke, Miriam. "Deploying the Muslim woman." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 24, no. 1 (2008): 91–99.
- Gender Equality Commission. "Activities Promoting Gender Mainstreaming at the National Level in Council of Europe Member States," 2017. <https://rm.coe.int/gender-mainstreaming-in-the-ms/168075df2c>.
- Gerintya, Scholastica. "Periksa Data: Kuota 30% Perempuan Di Parlemen Belum Pernah Tercapai." *Tirto.Id*. September 7, 2017. <https://tirto.id/kuota-30-perempuan-di-parlemen-belum-pernah-tercapai-cv8q>.
- Hambly, Gavin R.G. *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*. Edited by Gavin R.G. Hambly. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999.
- Hassim, Shireen. "From Presence to Power: Women's Citizenship in a New Democracy." *Agenda* 40 (1999): 6–17.
- Hidayah, Nur. "Mainstreaming Gender in Contemporary Indonesian Islam: The Challenges of Progressive Muslim Women's Organisations." *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 19, no. 1 (2019).
- Intan, Benyamin Fleming. "*Public Religion*" and the Pancasila-Based State of Indonesia: An Ethical and Sociological Analysis. New York: Peter Lang, 2006.
- Kartika, Dyah Ayu. "Pemilu 2019: Pintu Masuk Gelombang Baru Anti-Feminisme?" *Tirto.Id*. April 25, 2019. <https://tirto.id/pemilu-2019-pintu-masuk-gelombang-baru-anti-feminisme-dmTq>.
- Martin, Fiona, and Gerard Goggin. "Digital Transformations?: Gendering the End User in Digital Government Policy." *Journal of Information Policy* 6 (2016): 436–59.

- Martyn, Elizabeth. *The Women's Movement in Post-Colonial Indonesia: Gender and Nation in a New Democracy*. New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005.
- Mas'udi, Masdar Farid. "Perempuan Di Antara Lembaran Kitab Kuning." In *Islam Indonesia Dalam Kajian Tekstual Dan Kontekstual*, 158. Jakarta: Indonesia-Netherlands Cooperation in Islamic Studies, 1993.
- Maula, Bani Syarif. "Indonesian Muslim Women: Between Culture, Religion, and Politics." *Ijtimā'iyya: Journal of Muslim Society Research* 1, no. 1 (2016): 113–31.
- Muhibbu-Din, Mahmudat Olawunmi. "Feminism and Modern Islamic Politics: The Fact and the Fallacy." *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 15 (2009): 44–59.
- Munfarida, Elya. "Political Backdrop of the Indonesian Marriage Law of 1974." *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam* 6, no. 1 (2013): 129–42.
- Offenhauer, Priscilla. "Women In Islamic Societies: A Selected Review of Social Scientific Literature." *A Report Prepared by the Federal Research Division*. Library of Congress, 2005.
- Parawansa, Khofifah Indar. "Enhancing Women's Political Participation in Indonesia." In *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*. Stockholm: International IDEA, 2005.
- Prihatini, Ella. "On The Same Page? Support for Gender Quotas among Indonesian Lawmakers." *Asian Social Science* 14, no. 15 (2008): 48–59.
- Robinson, Kathryn. *Gender, Islam and Democracy in Indonesia*. London: Routledge, 2009.
- Rokhmansyah, Alfian. *Pengantar Gender Dan Feminisme: Pemahaman Awal Kritik Sastra Feminisme*. Yogyakarta: Penerbit Garudhawaca, 2016.
- Sarikakis, Katharine. "Power, Patriarchy, Profit: Barriers to Gender Mainstreaming in Media Policy." In *Media and Gender: A Scholarly Agenda for the Global Alliance on Media and Gender*, 66–69. Paris: UNESCO, 2014.

- Satriyo, Hana A. "The Ongoing Struggle for Women's Political Participation." *In-Asia: Weekly Insight and Features from Asia*. March 11, 2009. <https://asiafoundation.org/2009/03/11/the-ongoing-struggle-for-womens-political-participation/>.
- Schrijvers, Joke, and Els Postel-Coster. "Minangkabau Women: Change in a Matrilineal Society." *Archipel* 13 (1977): 79–103.
- Setiawan, Riyan. "Isi Kursi DPR 2019-2024, Porsi Perempuan Meningkat." *Tirto.Id*. September 8, 2019. <https://tirto.id/ehHG>.
- Siregar, Wahidah Zein. "Parliamentary Representation of Women in Indonesia: The Struggle for a Quota." *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 11, no. 3 (2005): 36–72.
- The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Gender Development Research Institute. "Women's Quotas: How to Introduce and Implement Them Better?" *Seminar and Workshop for Southeast Asia*. Bangkok, Thailand, June 2007.
- United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women. "Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes, with Particular Emphasis on Political Participation and Leadership." *Report of the Expert Group Meeting*. Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia, October 2005.
- Yosephine, Liza. "Cultural Barriers Hamper Women's Political Participation: UN Women." *The Jakarta Post*. May 20, 2016. <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/05/20/cultural-barriers-hamper-womens-political-participation-un-women.html>.