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CASE STUDY

Obstacles to Women's Political Participation in Indonesia

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The history of the representation of women in the Indonesian parliament is a long process in terms of the struggle of women in the public sphere. The first Indonesian Women's Congress in 1928, which prompted the emergence and increased women's nationalist spirit, is a turning point in history because of the Congress' role in improving opportunities for Indonesian women to participate in developing, including in political development. In the first general election in 1955, 6.5 percent of those elected to the parliament were women. Following this election, women's representation has ebbed and flowed, peaking at 13.0 percent in 1987. In 2002, women constituted 8.8 percent of elected representatives.

The under-representation of women in parliament is due to a range of obstacles limiting their progress. Thus a range of strategies must be studied simultaneously to overcome these obstacles, so that the goal of increased representation of women in parliament becomes a reality. This case study presents the levels of women's political representation in Indonesia, and examines some of these obstacles. It also presents various strategies that may be considered to overcome the problem of under-representation.

National Context

Under normal political circumstances, general elections in Indonesia are held every five years. The first general election was held in 1955, ten years after Indonesia achieved independence from colonialism under the Soekarno government. The second election was not held because the Constituent Assembly that had been charged with amending the 1945 Constitution could not complete this task, so that the government issued a decree in 1959 that returned Indonesia to the terms of the 1945 Constitution. At this point, Indonesia became a "guided democracy". The transition from the Old Order to the New Order took place in 1965 without an election.

After this transition, general elections were held in succession in 1971, 1977, 1982, 1987, 1992, and 1997. All these elections took place in the New Order era under the Soeharto government. The transition from the Soeharto government to that of B.J. Habibie after the 1997 election was followed by an accelerated election in 1999. At this time, the people demanding reform, driven onward by university students, played a major role in bringing forward a new national leader, Abdurrahman Wahid, the head of a newly established party.

The change in the manner in which general elections were conducted, with a relatively large number of political parties under the Old Order, to three legal parties under the New Order, to 48 parties in the reform era, resulted in significant changes to patterns of representation of women in various state institutions at different levels, particularly in the People's Constituent Assembly (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat* or DPR).

Even though, at the national level, women have been represented in both the DPR and the People's Consultative Assembly (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat* or MPR) since the 1955 election, the percentage rate of their participation has varied. The first Indonesian Women's Congress in 1928 was an historical milestone for Indonesian women in the expansion of their public role, particularly in politics. In this forum, women of various ethnic groups, religions, and languages were united.

The emergence and solidification of these organizations played a significant role in improving women's capacity, such as by improving management capabilities, expanding horizons, and developing networks. These organizations and movements increased the bargaining position of women, as demonstrated by the frequency that the leaders of these organizations became involved in a range of development activities, at the community level, in government, and in other institutions. In the political context, organizations that trained women and increased their women's capacity were an effective network for recruiting legislative candidates. During the first election in 1955, several women candidates were

women's organizations that were affiliated with parties. In the next election, there was a tendency for legislative candidates to come from the leadership of women's organizations that were either part of the parties or affiliated with them.

In a country that follows a patriarchal value system, like Indonesia, the chances for women to become politicians are limited because society's perceptions regarding the division of roles between men and women tends to be biased towards thinking that a woman's role should be limited to managing the household. Despite this, during the period of Indonesia's fight for independence, the need for fighters, both men and women, opened up a great opportunity for women to become involved, outside the arena of domestic responsibilities. Society accepted and honored women freedom fighters who joined the struggle on the battlefield, in education, in medicine, and in handling logistics. This opportunity facilitated women's continued involvement in issues that affected them or that were going on around them, as well as political issues.¹

After the 1955 election, during the Old Order, the number of women in the DPR was 17, four of whom came from the ranks of Gerwani and five from Muslimat NU. This election was seen as being democratic, with women's participation in politics based on their capabilities as leaders of units inside political party organizations.

Unlike the Old Order (the Soekarno era), in the New Order (the Soeharto era) with its concept of a single majority party, the representation of women in the legislature and in state institutions was determined by party leaders at the central level, a specific elite. As a result, the majority of women holding important posts did so by virtue of their familial relationships or close ties with officials and power holders at the central level. This situation was possible because under the proportional representation system used in the elections, people did not choose individual candidates, but party symbols for the regency (*kabupaten*), provincial and national level of government. As a result, some of these candidates did not pass through a selection process, and most likely were not equipped to articulate the needs of their constituents.

In the 1999 election, the electoral process underwent significant changes, and the recruitment of party candidates for the legislature, including women, required the approval of the regions, specifically the regional party officials (although this did not apply to representatives from the armed forces and the police). The majority of the women elected here participated in the electoral process, through community advocacy, discussions, speeches and other party activities associated with the election campaign.

Representation of Women in the DPR/MPR

Together with other institutions, the MPR has the responsibility to establish and renew the Broad State Guidelines (*Garis Besar Haluan Negara* or GBHN) as a basis for the functioning of the government and the implementation of state policy. Since 1988, these guidelines have contained provisions regarding the role of women, aside from the existence of the cabinet position of Junior Minister for Women's Affairs. This position continues to exist, although its name along with its vision and mission, has undergone a series of changes. Women's issues, which have now been articulated as gender issues, have been addressed in the Broad State Guidelines issued in 1993, 1998, and 1999.

In the 1999 Broad State Guidelines, it was declared that the empowerment of women would be conducted through a two-fold strategy. First, improvements would be made in the position and role of women in the nation and state through national policies formulated and implemented by institutions capable of facilitating gender equality and justice. Second, improvements would be made in the quality, role and independence of women's organizations, while stressing the values of unity and the historical value of the women's movement, in continuing efforts to empower women and safeguard the prosperity and well-being of the family and society.

Unlike previous guidelines, which were intended exclusively for the executive branch, these guidelines were intended as basic principles for all state agencies, including the executive (the President), the judiciary (the Supreme Court), the legislative (DPR/MPR) and the state audit agency (*Badan Pemeriksa Keuangan* or BPK), particularly in the statement about improving the position and role of women in national life.

From a normative point of view, it is not legislation that discriminates against women in Indonesia. However, in reality, the representation of women in legislative bodies at various levels, including at the regency and provincial levels (in the Regional People's Representative Assemblies; known as DPRD Level I and DPRD Level II) and at the national level (in the DPR), is still very low. In general, women are underrepresented in the political arena and in other areas, as the following table demonstrates:

TABLE 3: Women in Formal Political Institutions in Indonesia in 2002

Institution	Women		Men	
	Total	%	Total	%
MPR	18	9.2	117	90.8

DPR	44	8.8	455	91.2
Supreme Court	7	14.8	40	85.2
State Audit Agency	0	0	7	100
Supreme Advisory Council	2	4.4	43	95.6
National Election Commission	2	18.1	9	81.9
Governor (provincial level)	0	0	30	100
Mayor/Regent (metropolitan district/regency level)	5	1.5	331	98.5
Civil Service Echelon IV & III*	1,883	7.0	25,110	93.0
Judges*	536	16.2	2,775	83.8
State Civil Court*	35	23.4	150	76.6

* Speech delivered by the State Minister for the Empowerment of Women, 21 June 2001, at a workshop on women's representation and the election.

Source: Data formulated by the Division on Women and the Elections, CETRO, 2001.

In 2002, only nine percent of the DPR's representatives are women. This is the lowest level of representation since the national election held in 1987.

TABLE 4: Representation of Women in the DPR in 2002

Period	Women		Men	
	Total	%	Total	%
1950 - 1955 (Provisional DPR)	9	3.8	236	96.2
1955 - 1960	17	6.3	272	93.7
Constituent Assembly: 1956 - 1959*	25	5.1	488	94.9
1971 - 1977	36	7.8	460	92.2
1977 - 1982	29	6.3	460	93.7
1982 - 1987	39	8.5	460	91.5
1987 - 1992	65	13.0	500	87.0
1992 - 1997	65	12.5	500	87.5
1997 - 1999	54	10.8	500	89.2
1999 - 2004	45	9.0	500	91.0

Based on the 1955 election, the DPR contained 272 representatives, but President Soekarno formed the Constituent Assembly to revise the constitution. This assembly was dismissed by Soekarno in 1959 because it was deadlocked. The dismissal was ordered through a presidential decree on 5 July 1959.

Source: DPR Secretariat, 2001. Data reformulated by the Division on Women and the Elections, CETRO, 2002. With this level of representation, the IPU ranks Indonesia as 83rd in terms of women's representation in the legislature (March 2002).

Furthermore, in the DPR commissions, women tend to hold posts that are traditionally seen as "soft" relating to women's issues, as demonstrated in the next table.

TABLE 5: DPR Commission Members According to Gender in 2002

Commission	Women		Men	
	Total	%	Total	%
I HANKAM*	4	7.0	53	93.0

II	Law and Internal Affairs	3	4.9	53	95,1
III	Food and Agriculture	3	5.7	49	94.3
IV	Transport and Infrastructure	4	7.2	51	92.8
V	Industry and Trade	6	9.6	50	90.4
VI	Religion, Education and Culture	6	12.5	42	87.5
VII	Health and Population	11	25.0	33	75.0
VIII	IPTEK** and Environment	4	7.2	51	92.8
IX	Finance and Development	3	5.4	52	94.5
Total	(100%)	44	8.5	439	91.5

* HANKAM (Defense and Security)

** IPTEK (Science and Technology)

Source: DPR Secretariat, 2002. Data reformulated by the Division of Women and the Elections, CETRO, 2002.

The data here demonstrates that the distribution of female members in these commissions reflects traditional patterns for dividing responsibilities between men and women. The highest percentage of women members is found in Commission VII (which involves social welfare and the empowerment of women). The second highest percentage of women members is found in Commission VI, which involves issues related to religion, education, and culture.

The representation of women in commissions with the mandate to discuss issues concerning economics and politics, particularly in terms of representation and poverty, is very important, keeping in mind that the commissions are one of the institutions for determining programs and executive spending.

The lack of women's representation in the political arena is caused, among other things, by the patriarchal culture that does not allow for equal access in the form of affirmative action for women, such as in the provision of quotas. The state guidelines, and other political and legal instruments, do not explicitly discriminate against women but also do not provide easy defense or access points for women in many areas, including politics. The 1945 Constitution, Chapter X, Section 27 states that "All citizens are equal before the law and the government," while Section 28 guarantees "Freedom of association and union, and the freedom to express opinions both orally and in writing." In a patriarchal situation, women face many obstacles in achieving equality with men in a range of areas.

Obstacles Preventing Women from Becoming Members of Parliament

There are several factors influencing the patterns of the recruitment of men and women as legislators.²

The first factor relates to the cultural context in Indonesia that is still heavily patriarchal. The common perception is that the political arena is for men, and that it is inappropriate for women to become members of parliament.

The second factor relates to the selection process within political parties. The selection of candidates is usually conducted by a small group of officials or party leaders, almost always men. In some countries, including Indonesia, where awareness regarding gender equality and justice is still low, male leaders of political parties have a disproportionate influence over party politics. Women do not receive much support from political parties because of domination of their structures by men.

Third, the media has an important effect in developing public opinion regarding the importance of the representation of women in parliament.

Fourth, there is no network of organizations, NGOs, and political parties to fight for the representation of women. A network of women's organizations in Indonesia only began to play a significant role since 1999.

In addition to these points, the following can be added:

Poverty and the low level of education of women

It is often extremely difficult to recruit women with political capabilities that allow them to compete with men. The women who have adequate political capabilities tend to engage in advocacy or choose non-partisan roles.

Family factors

Women with families often experience certain obstacles, particularly opposition from their spouses. Many husbands tend to resist their views, and extra activities outside the household. Political activities usually require a high level of

involvement and large investments of time and money, and many women often hold positions that are not rewarding financially. Exceptions occur when women achieve positions that are considered financially rewarding, such as election to the legislature.

The multi-party system

With a large number of political parties contesting elections and winning seats in parliament, the level of representation of women is affected, as each party can expect to gain a limited number of seats in parliament. There is a tendency to divide the limited number of seats among men, which has a direct effect on the level of representation of women.

Strategies to Increase the Representation of Women

Support and strengthen links between women's networks and organizations

In Indonesia, there are currently several major associations of women's organizations. For example, the Indonesian Women's Congress (KOWANI) is a federation of 78 women's organizations, which cooperates with women from a range of different religions, ethnicities, and professional organizations. The Deliberation Board of Indonesian Muslim Women's Organizations (BMOIWI) is a federation of approximately 28 Muslim women's organizations. The Center for the Political Empowerment of Women is a network of organizations that cuts across party, religious, and professional lines and includes approximately 26 organizations. All these networks have significant potential to support increased representation of women in parliament, both in quantitative and qualitative terms if they and their member organizations work together to synergize their efforts.

The development of networks of women's organizations, and creating synergy, is very important to support women in parliament, and for those seeking election to parliament.

Increase the representation of women in political parties

Women should try hard to occupy strategic positions within the political parties, such as chairperson or secretary, because these positions decide many issues of party policy.

Conduct advocacy with the leaders of political parties

This is needed in order to create awareness of the importance of accommodating women in parliament, particularly in reminding people of the fact that the majority of voters in Indonesia are women.

Develop access to the media

This is important because the print and electronic media heavily influence opinions of the policy makers in the political parties and of the general public.

Increase the understanding and awareness of women through education and training

This is necessary to increase women's confidence in their ability to compete against men to become members of parliament. At the same time, it is necessary to socialize the concept that the political arena is open to all citizens, and that politics is not simply an arena full of conflict and dirty tricks.

Improving the capabilities and political experiences of women

The representation of women in parliament requires a qualitative increase in their capabilities, given that the process of political recruitment should mostly be conducted based on merit. Improvements in women's capabilities can be achieved through improving their access to economic, health, and educational facilities.

Introduce a quota to increase women members of parliament

Legislation and other legal instruments are currently being discussed that it is hoped will provide explicitly for a quota system to ensure a minimum level for women members of parliament.

The Road Ahead

Since the Habibie administration (1998-1999), there has been increased openness in the political system, the number of NGOs has increased, and limitations on the activities of political parties have been lifted. This atmosphere has had a positive influence on the position of women. Various NGOs active in the area of women's rights have increased their activities. During the Wahid administration, a political caucus of women, consisting of an association of members of parliament and the Center for the Political Empowerment of Women, a network of women's organizations, emerged.

These associations emerged to develop a network for women in parliament, leaders of political parties, leaders of mass organizations, and other stakeholders to increase and strengthen their efforts. In general, these associations agreed to advocate a quota for women's representation, expressing the need for minimum quota of 20-30 percent for women's representation in parliament. They have also advocated the inclusion of this quota in the constitution, although they have not yet succeeded. At present, they are seeking to persuade the DPR and the Department of Home Affairs (the body responsible for formulating revisions to the Constitution) that a quota should be included in future amendments to the Constitution. They are also communicating with the leadership of political parties to address the issue of women's representation in strategic positions within the political parties.

In the midst of the attempts of women's groups to press the issue of the quota, it was perhaps surprising that President Megawati Soekarnoputri, on her Mothers' Day address on 27 December 2001, expressed her opposition to the demands for a quota. The President expressed her opinion that a quota would in fact reduce women's standing, and place an increased burden on women and on the institutions they would occupy.³ Despite this, Indonesian women activists have continued to press for increased representation through the imposition of a quota.

Finally, aside from the issue of a quota, a pressing issue is that the level of representation of women in parliament could be increased and the aspirations of the community could be better channeled, through revisions to the electoral system. Until now, the system in force in Indonesia has been one of proportional representation. Many argue that proportional representation affords the best opportunity to increase representation, as women can be forwarded for election through the use of candidate lists. If women are well represented on these lists in a beneficial ranking, they stand a good chance of being elected. Therefore, revisions to the electoral system can have a positive impact on the election of women to parliament in the future.

Endnotes

1. A few years after independence, the President of Indonesia gave a special task to Suwarni Pringgodigdo to lead an Indonesian women's movement. During the independence struggle, centers for provision of logistics were established. See "Zaman Berubah Sesudah Kartini," *Tempo*, 29 April 1978, pp. 55-57.
2. Richard E. Matland, 2001. "Sistem Perwakilan dan Pemilihan Kaum Perempuan: Pelajaran untuk Indonesia," in *Keterwakilan Perempuan dan Sistem Pemilihan Umum*. Jakarta: National Democratic Institute and the State Minister for Women's Empowerment, p. 22.
3. Speech of President Megawati Soekarnoputri on Mother's Day, Jakarta, 27 December 2001.

Further Reading

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