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CASE STUDY

Legislative Recruitment and Electoral Systems in Indonesia¹

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There are no formal legal barriers that prevent women from taking part in decision making in Indonesia, yet the number of women in elected positions remains low. For the past 56 years since the country's independence, Indonesian women have faced a number of obstacles in the public and private spheres, where politically, legally, socially, culturally, and economically, they are often at a disadvantage. These disadvantages are structurally embedded in Indonesian society.

In terms of public life, there are a number of factors that act as disadvantages for Indonesian women entering politics. For example, the continued perception of the dichotomy between the private and public spheres has made it difficult for Indonesian women to be actively involved in their country's political life. A further factor is the nature of the electoral system, and how political parties advance or promote women as candidates in elections.

This case study will examine the electoral system and political party dynamics that affect the representation of women in Indonesia. Political parties are effectively the gatekeepers to elected office – how and where women are placed in party candidate lists has an important effect on the number of women elected to parliament. This case study will also provide suggestions for increasing the legislative recruitment of women in elections in Indonesia.

National Context

Women were granted the right to vote and contest elections in 1945. Historically, however, the level of women's political representation in Indonesia has been low. In the legislative period of 1950 – 1955, women constituted 3.8 percent of members of parliament, and 6.3 percent between 1955 and 1960. During the next thirty years, the highest level of women's representation of 13 percent was reached in the legislative period of 1987-1992.² In parliament, and other political institutions at the local, provincial and national levels, representation of Indonesian women remains low.

There has been a downward trend in the representation of women in parliament in Indonesia: from 12.5 percent in 1992, to 9.0 percent in the 1999 parliamentary elections.

During the 1992-1997 legislative period, women held 12.5 percent of the seats. This number decreased to 10.8 percent in the 1997-1998 legislative period. The downward trend in the numbers of women has continued, where in the 1999-2004 legislative period, only 9.0 percent of the total members of the national parliament (DPR) elected were women.³ Despite the fact that at present Indonesia has a woman president, there are few party office holders who are women, and in the civil service and the judiciary, there are few women in high positions.⁴

In the 1999 elections, approximately 57 percent of all voters were women, although there is currently no complete data available concerning the actual number of women voters.⁵ The paucity of data available on this specific issue indicates how the Indonesian political public, including the government, views its relevance and significance.

The low representation of women in Indonesia raises important questions regarding the challenges and obstacles that prevent women from participating in public life.

Key Challenges

In 1999, 48 political parties contested the general election and 21 parties won seats in parliament. The election was conducted using closed list proportional representation. While the election of women to parliament in Indonesia is

influenced by a number of factors such as patriarchy, a hostile environment and family commitments, an important factor is the nature of political parties, women's political base, how they are socialized within political parties, and electoral procedures.

P*olitical parties play an important role in influencing the numbers of women who are elected to parliament. To date political parties have not yet shown a firm commitment concerning equal opportunities for women to be recruited as party functionaries and members of parliament.*

Political parties play an important role in determining the numbers of women who are elected to parliament. To date, within their own organizations, political parties have not yet shown firm commitment and policy formulations concerning equal opportunities for their women members to be elected as party functionaries and members of parliament. The way political parties compile their candidate lists for elective office, how many women are included in these lists, and whether women are placed in "electable" positions so far indicates a lack of concern and commitment for women's representation. In some instances, discriminatory actions are taken by political party functionaries against their own women members in selecting their candidates for both regional and national parliaments.⁶

There is also no concerted strategy to attract more women into political parties. Women are not encouraged to join, and there is an absence of programs to socialize and to train women party members to become highly skilled and qualified party cadres. The arrangement of organizational activities by political parties shows a lack of consideration towards women's needs and interests. There are often schedule conflicts between political party events and meetings and the needs of women party members who have to be responsible for their own households. There is a shortage of policy formulations and official programs by the political parties that highlight and emphasize the importance of women's needs, interests and issues within the parties themselves, in parliament, and in public life.

Some Solutions

In light of the low representation of women, and difficulties in making inroads into the system, many women are making demands for their increased participation and representation in parliament. Political parties are being challenged as they are the important "gatekeepers" to elective offices such as parliament. Some have demanded that there should be a quota to ensure women's representation in legislative, executive, and judicial bodies.⁷ In this context, it needs to be emphasized that the majority of political parties do not agree with the quota system and affirmative action policies for women. As one research study shows, 75 percent of Indonesian political parties are opposed to the use of quotas and affirmative action.⁸

With regard to political parties and elections, different strategies for promoting the participation of women in Indonesia can be considered:

- During elections, the representation of women will increase only if there is a change in the structure and internal workings of political parties. This requires a process that is more democratic, appropriate, and transparent that would make it possible for women members to become party functionaries. What is also important is how political parties compile their candidate lists for elective office, and where women are placed on the lists, since this greatly affects the representation and election of women.
- One way of increasing women's contribution in political life is through the implementation of affirmative action policies. This could be implemented through a Law on Political Parties which democratizes the internal structure of the political parties, and which for example, requires political party functionaries to elect a minimum of 30 percent women candidates for all levels. Such a law could also ensure that the way in which political parties recruit their functionaries at each level should be clearly stated in the regulation of political parties. Furthermore, the criteria for the recruitment of candidates as political party functionaries should be measurable and transparent.

R*ules and procedures that are clear, transparent and gender-balanced for the recruitment of candidates in political parties can help women advance in elections for political office.*

Alternatively, an affirmative action policy could also be implemented through a Law on General Elections, comprising of:

- One criteria to be considered in selecting candidates should be the principle of gender equality which should be measurable and transparent. The recruitment and selection of candidates for election should have a minimum of 30 percent women.
- The implementation of the method of alternating men and women consistently in the compilation of political party lists can be considered;
- Requirements and mechanisms for the election of candidates within political parties should be stated clearly in the regulations. Allowing independents to become legislative candidates for general elections may provide an incentive for women to run as candidates.⁹
- The Law on General Elections No. 3/1999 states that there is public funding for elections in Indonesia. But the same law does not state a specific and detailed allocation of the public funding. It has been suggested that the allocation of public funding could be tied to the number of women forwarded for election, as is the case in France. There is little support for this proposal among political parties, as it is considered to be an intervention in their internal party workings.

Together with the above proposals, it is important to note some of the positive strategies that have been used by women in Indonesia:

First, there has been the establishment of a network across party lines made up of women members of political parties (Indonesian Women Political Caucus or KPPI) and a caucus of women members of parliament. This network is still in an embryonic stage as both caucuses have only recently been established. They are currently directing their efforts towards promoting the representation of women in the Indonesian political system.

Second, there is an increased awareness and commitment by several women's organizations which are officially tied to political parties to increase the number of women. This is being proposed through the use of affirmative action mechanisms, a measure which was formally included in the agenda of several political parties' congresses.

Third, there have been efforts to implement affirmative action by some political parties such as PDI-P (Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle), which has a formal policy of including one woman to five men in electing the party's functionaries at the local branches. However, it is facing difficulties implementing this policy because there is no control mechanism within the internal party structure. A more positive example is PDI-P's efforts to elect women legislators to succeed members who, because of various factors, are not able to complete their full term in parliament. At present, there are four women parliament members who have been elected through this strategy.¹⁰

S*ome political parties have adopted affirmative action for women when recruiting candidates for election, but because there are no enforcement mechanisms, this policy is not always implemented.*

Fourth, women NGO activists in Indonesia concerned with the political representation of women have made several efforts to strengthen women's candidacies. These efforts include: organizing public discussions on the importance of increasing women's representation in the legislature, organizing discussions and workshops for the media in cities where public discussions are held, interviews and talk shows in local radio and television stations, conducting workshops and discussions with women caucuses both from the political parties and the national parliament, advocating the importance of increasing women's political representation through the use of affirmative action mechanisms and reform of the electoral law, and organising a public awareness campaign by disseminating publications and articles relating to the idea of increasing women's representation in the political system.

Conclusion

The lack of empirical data available on the issue of women's political representation in Indonesia is one of the major challenges in furthering the investigation on this subject. Notwithstanding, the compilation of several different data and informal interviews with women members of parliament and political parties indicates a structural disadvantage faced by Indonesian women in political representation. Cultural, social, legal, and economic factors are all influential. In addition, the current political structure has a great impact on the election of women to parliament.

This case study has examined various structural problems that women encounter in recruitment to political parties, and in exercising their political rights. The strategies proposed here suggest that a change in the Indonesian political structure, especially regarding the political parties and electoral procedures, is important. A more institutionalised party system, an organizational structure with clear and transparent regulations, a more progressive party ideology, and increasing activism on gender issues within political parties may positively influence the representation of women in

parliament.¹¹ An increase in the number of women may result in a change in programs and policy formulations of the political parties towards a more active concern and involvement with women's issues, needs, and interests.

Endnotes

1. The author acknowledges the support and assistance of Nuri Soeseno, Ayu Soegoro, and Dwi Rahayu from CETRO in providing data, information, and resources.
2. CETRO, 2002 "Data dan Fakta Keterwakilan Perempuan Indonesia di Partai Politik dan Lembaga Legislatif, 1999-2001". (Executive Summary). Jakarta, 8 March. P.3 (unpublished).
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid. p. 2
6. Information received from informal interviews with women members of political parties and members of the national parliament.
7. International IDEA and Yayasan Jurnal Perempuan, 1999. *Reformation and Democracy For Us Too: Politics for Women and Women for Politics*. Jakarta: IDEA and YJP. P. 14.
8. Yayasan API. 1999. *Almanak Parpol Indonesia*. Jakarta: Yayasan API; CETRO. 2002. P. 13.
9. CETRO. 2002. P.19.
10. Ibid. P.15.
11. Ibid. P.14.

References and Further Reading

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