

## PARTICIPATION OF INDONESIAN WOMEN IN POLITICS

Wardah Hayati

*(Lecturer of IAIN Antasari Banjarmasin)*

**Abstrak:** Masih memerlukan perjuangan yang panjang bagi wanita Indonesia untuk memperjuangkan keterwakilan mereka di lembaga-lembaga politik. Sampai saat ini keterwakilan perempuan di lembaga legislatif masih sangat kecil jika dibanding jumlah populasi perempuan. Artikel ini dimaksudkan untuk menelusuri pentingnya keterlibatan perempuan di bidang politik, masalah-masalah yang dihadapi dan upaya untuk meningkatkan partisipasi mereka.

**Keyword:** politics, under representation, gender ideology, patriarchal, education

### Introduction

Women's participation in politic is a necessity and even a must because their representation in the political arena would create greater possibility to influence those who establish and implement politic. Thus, Indonesian women have been struggled in public space for their political participation and their representation in its parliament. The first Indonesian Women's congress in 1928 became a very important point in Indonesian history because the Congress is a good start of the emergence of an increased women's nationalist activism and improving opportunities for Indonesian women to participate in every aspects of this country. Actually the guidelines of state policy explicitly state that women have the same rights, obligations and opportunities as men including in politic. However, this statement is always perceived that the participation of women in the development must not conflict with their roles in improving family welfare and education of the young generation. That is the reason why even though during the struggle for independence, up to and after 1945, Indonesian women played a major roles in armed services and generally in public sphere, after the independence most women in line with the homecoming

of men from war were drawn back to private sphere. And patriarchal values widely reemerged such as the perception that the role of women was to managed the household<sup>1</sup>.

There is a long standing perception that the world of politics is identical with the men's world. This perception emerges because politics is identically imaged as dirty, hard and full of intrigues, and of such kind which identified belong to men's characteristics. As a result, there is only a small number of women willing to involved in the world politics, even in countries with high level of democracy and equality. Besides that, the impression that politic as men's world because historically since its early development men are always identified as an 'institution' or 'public activity'. On the other hand, women are responsible for the family activity such as cooking, child rearing, household work. However, in line with the arising level of modernization and globalization, as well as the effort of women emancipation, women's attitude and roles particularly their opinion about politics have shifted. Women are not only as housewives with their domestic role but also actively involve in many aspects of life such as in social, economy and politics.

Even though Indonesian women has been involved in public sector, both from the side of quantity and quality are not sufficient enough. This is sharply contrast with the amount of Indonesian women population. According to BPS Statistic Indonesia 2005, Indonesian population in 218,686,791 and women make up 50,1 per cent of this population. It is more than a half of Indonesian population but when it is examined from women's participation in political arena their representation in House of Representatives nationally is just 11.3 percent. In the first general election of 1955, women made up 6.5 percent of those elected to Parliament. Since this election, women representation has ebbed and flowed, rising at 13.0 percent in 1987. After the first general election of the reform era, women made up 8.8 percent of the elected representatives in 1999 and then rising to 11.3 percent in 2004. Using the level of representation, the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 2005 places Indonesia on the 75<sup>th</sup> position out of more than 180 countries in terms of women representation in legislature. The under-representation of women in the Indonesian

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<sup>1</sup> Khoffifah Indar Parawansa, *Hambatan terhadap Partisipasi Politik Perempuan di Indonesia, Perempuan di Parlemen: Bukan Sekadar Jumlah*, (IDEA, 2002), 42.

parliament is due to a range of obstacles. This paper tries to observe the necessity women representation in the parliament, the obstacles that women should consider or face when they participate in political arena, and strategies to increase their participation in politics.

### Women's Participation In Indonesian Politics

In Beijing 1995, 189 member states of the United Nations signed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995 and then they committed themselves to ensuring women's equal access to, and full participation in, power structures and decision-making. However, at the time of signing, women constituted fewer than 12% of parliamentary members worldwide, a percentage which is also mirrored in Indonesia. A clear view about Indonesian women representation in the politic can be observed in the table below:

Representation of Women in Indonesia: The House of representative (DPR)

	Women		Men	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
1950-1955 (Provincial 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
1071-1977	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
2004-2009	62	11.3	488	88.7

*Source:* DPR Secretariat 2001, Data formulated by the Division of Women and the elections, Centro 2002. <sup>2</sup>

It can be seen that the peak of women's representation in the House of Parliament was in 1987-1992 and in the latest election (2009), there is 12,6 per cent of women who constitute the Indonesian House of

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

Parliament. However, though there is an increase in the number of women representation, there is still a tendency of women to hold posts that are traditionally seen as 'soft' (relating to women issue). The higher percentage of women member is found in commissions such as educating, youth, sport, tourism, art and culture. While in 'prestige' commissions such as economics, poverty and politics which are considered as significant in determining executive progress and budget, women's representation is relatively low. So that the distribution of female member in the commission of the national legislature reflects traditional patterns for dividing responsibilities between men and women.

Is it matter if women are underrepresented in the parliament? Considering the amount of population where in Indonesia, women constitute more than a half of Indonesian population (50.1%) while their representatives only 11.3 per cent. Of course it is not a proper presentation.. Actually, both men and women have equal rights in politics, economic, and social. However, decision making and setting priority continue to be largely in hands of men. Women have different value, needs, and aspiration from men and these differences can not be coped by men. Democratic framework actually should take into account gendered perspectives and involving both women and men in decision making process. Hence democracy, by definition, cannot afford to gender blind. It must strive towards equality and representation of women and men in decision making processes and to achieve both these goals.<sup>3</sup>

But, some argue that people who hold the decision making power within the state use it 'for the common good' or 'in the public interest'. In this opinion, the demands for more women in decision making roles seems unnecessary. Margaret Teacher, for example, says that women behave no differently than men in decision making positions, so having more women in such roles would make no different. Is it true that that male decision makers act 'in the public interest' or 'for common good' and that women decision-makers make no difference? According to Vicker, data in the US shows that even women legislators who do not consider themselves to be feminist are more likely than men legislators to support the introduction and retention of state programs and entitlements of benefit to women. She

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<sup>3</sup> J. Ballington, *Introduction in Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, (Sweden: IDEA, 2005), 24.

also proposed a fact that where more women play decision making roles in state institutions, the interest of most women in retaining unexpanded welfare state is more easily defended.<sup>4</sup> Rosenthal 2002 and Swers 2002 are among scholars who try to find out the difference between male and female legislators. Their study have demonstrated that women legislators not only give higher priority than male legislators to issues such as women's rights, education, health care, families and children, the environment, and gun control, but also are willing to devote considerable effort in committee and on the floor to securing passage of progressive legislation in these areas.<sup>5</sup> In short, these facts shows that women legislators are more likely to respond to women's interests and needs. And having a significant number of women in a decision –making body makes that body are more understand their concerns.

Rosenthal and Tamerus in Hawkesworth (2005) have compared women's and men's legislative and leadership styles. They found that women pursue cooperative legislative strategies while men prefer competitive, zero-sum tactics; women are more oriented toward consensus, preferring less hierarchical, more participatory, and more collaborative approaches than their male counterparts.<sup>6</sup> With this style of legislative strategies, ones might hope for a more ethical life of politics, rather than hard politics such as arm race, war, and nuclear weapon. The unpreferable condition which start to happen nowadays. Another surprising finding shows that according to the Transparency International Report of 1997, countries such as Nigeria, Pakistan, Kenya, Bangladesh and others are perceived to be most corrupt. And fact shows that in these countries women's representation in parliaments is very low, only three to nine per cent are women MPs. Whereas Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and New Zealand are perceived as the least corrupt, and in these countries women MPs comprise from 30 per cent to 40.4 per cent in other words, five to ten times more. So, from these cases, it means that where more women involved in political arena, the greater possibility of abolishing the label of parliament as the fertile arena for corruption. In sum, for the sake of justice,

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<sup>4</sup> J.Vickers, *Reinventing Political Science: A Feminist Approach*, (USA: Fennwood, 1997), 35.

<sup>5</sup> M. Hawkesworth, *Engendering Political Science: An Immodest Proposal*, *Politics & Gender* I (1) 2005, 145.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

equity and human rights, the representation of women and the inclusion of their perspective and experience into the decision process will inevitably lead to solution that are more viable and satisfy a broader range of society.

### Challenges For Women's Involvement In Politics

There are a lot of obstacles for women to involved in politics. At the very beginning of entering world of politic, they will find that the political, public, cultural, and social environment is often unfriendly to them. At least there are three large components of obstacles which women would confront if they want to involve in political activity. The first and most important is about gender ideology and cultural patterns including social roles assigned to women and men. All over the world, societies are dominated by an ideology about a woman's place. In this perspective, women should only play the role as a mother and a wife, if she work it is generally low paid and apolitical.<sup>7</sup> The most appropriate place for a woman is at home as a mother for child rearing and bearing. Working for women is just considered as an additional income. Indah Pariwansa says that the cultural context in Indonesia is still heavily patriarchal. Within this atmosphere, it is common to perceive that political arena is for men and that it is less preferable for women to become members of parliament.<sup>8</sup>

Many women who want to involve in politics should face the environment in which the image of women in traditional and apolitical roles continues to dominate. Women in dilemma because in order to be successful they should be asexual in her speech and manner. Often it is regarded unacceptable or even shameful in the mass opinion if women leader open their feminine nature. Based on their experimental research Hutson-Comeaux in Smith shows that female politician who show emotion are evaluated less favorable than male politicians, especially when that emotion is anger. Male politicians on the other hand were not judged more critically when they display angry.<sup>9</sup> This research suggests that there is a double standard on how male and politicians were judged. As a matter of

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<sup>7</sup> N. Shvedova, "Kendala-kendala Terhadap Partisipasi Perempuan" dalam *Perempuan di Parlemen Bukan Sekedar Jumlah*, (Sweden: International IDEA), 2002), 33.

<sup>8</sup> Khofifah, *Hambatan terhadap Partisipasi Politik Perempuan di Indonesia*, 48.

<sup>9</sup> E.S. Smith, *Gender Roles, Impression Management Goals and Political Attitudes. Why Don't More Young Women Run for Public Office?* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of Southern Political Science Association, Jan 4-7-2006, 6.

fact, the more authoritative and manly a woman is, does not it mean she correspond to the undeclared male rules that men had already been set in politic? Again, as Shvedova said women involved in political world should overcome this difficulty of feeling uncomfortable in the political field as though they are somewhere where they do not belong, behaving in ways that are not natural for them.<sup>10</sup>

Then, in most countries including Indonesia, politics is perceived as a 'dirty' game. This has distanced the women's confidence to confront political arena. The most common negative label for politic is as a place of corruption. According to Shvedova even though this perception may not the actual state of the parliament, it has an impact on women's attitude towards a political career.<sup>11</sup> Women are afraid of involving to political party because mostly they do not want to be infected by this 'disease' which will end their family's dignity.

Moreover, some women, may have full time-jobs, as wives and mothers as well as full time careers for examples as teachers, lawyers, or doctors and then becoming parliamentarian in these condition might then be considered as a third-full time job. Women's dual burden put a lot of constraint on women, so allocated time for political activities are limited. The perception and stereotyping of women created another major problem for participation in public life. Women are not considered to be 'normal' if they just focus only on their career including develop their political life. They have to succeed in both their roles in order to be perceived as successful women. Meanwhile, women with families, often experience obstacle in particular opposition from the spouses. all of which militates against their political involvement or their running for elected bodies. Women have to succeed in both their roles in order to be perceived as successful politician

All of these socio and cultural perceptions are internalized and ends up with the women's lack of confidence in themselves. Living and brought up in a gendered world, often women internalize many of bias perception; women are only responsible for domestic affair, politics is men's world and ends feeling a sense of incapable of correspond to the political sphere. This has caused women to adopt a passive approach to politics, including general

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<sup>10</sup> N. Shvedova, "Kendala-kendala Terhadap Partisipasi Perempuan", 33.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

perception that politics is negative and has made women to identify and develop strategies for increasing women's effectiveness within their political work<sup>12</sup>

One of the other main reasons for women under representation in formal political situations, including parliaments, governments, and political parties is low level of education and economy. Because of poverty and low level of education of women it becomes difficult to recruit women who have the political capabilities that would allow them to compete on equal basis with men. Even though there is no consistent correlation between literacy rates and women's political representation, but many candidacy nomination procedures require a minimum level of literacy. The 2003 electoral law has set a standard of educational qualification at least senior high school graduate who are allowed to compete in the election. In a region where the level of women literacy rates is low, this law might prevent women from registering as candidates for election. In fact, nationally, women's education level is lower than men's.

Political activities require a lot of budget, and this also can be the source of women's obstacle to enter political arena. They need to hold campaigns, distribute leaflet and so many other political activities which need a lot of financial budget. In fact, many women hold position that are not rewarding financially. Income disparity between men and women diminishes significantly with higher educational achievement. Some women's activists believe that a growing number of professional women are advancing in a variety of fields, especially in the legal profession. However, no statistics are available to support this assertion. According to a study conducted during the year, only 20 percent of top managers and affluent consumers in Jakarta are female. So, from the sides of education and economic independency which are requirements for participating in political domain, women are still left behind men.

The mass media which can be called as a powerful tool because of its influence in creating public opinion and public consciousness, have not yet do effectively play its roles. It has not optimally mobilized the public opinion regarding the importance of women representation in the

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<sup>12</sup> F. Seda, "Women and Politics in Indonesia: A General Overview of Strengthening Woman's Political Participation", dalam ([http:// wdh.org/ media/ PDFs/ Jakarta1.pdf](http://wdh.org/media/PDFs/Jakarta1.pdf)), 2.

parliament. According to Shevedova, often, the mass media tends to minimize coverage of events and organizations of interest to women. The media, including women's publications, does not adequately inform the public about the rights and roles of women in society; nor does it take issue with government measures for improving women's position.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, she adds that media can be used to gender bias and stereotype about women's place by helping conservative governments and societies which blame women for the failure in family policy, divorce and minor crime. The most obvious widespread trend in the media is to depict women as beautiful objects. Admittedly, the mass media also reports stories about women politicians, or successful businesswomen. But this kind of news is rare and infrequent. Mostly the topics are about fashion competition, beauty contests, movie stars or eternal youth. With its illustration and advertisement, mass media made women to internalize certain notion of beauty and attractiveness which relate more to a woman's physical capacities than to her mental faculties. Not surprisingly, such views hardly promote women's sense of self-worth and self-respect or encourage them to take on positions of public responsibility.

From political obstacles, many obstacles to women participation also raised. Since men largely dominated the political arena, they largely dominate the formulation and evaluation of the political games. Further, male norms and values somehow adopted as the political lifestyle. For example politics is often based on the idea of 'winners and losers', competition and confrontation rather than on systemic collaboration and consensus, especially among parties<sup>14</sup>. Parliamentary work schedules reflects the male dominated working pattern, which is often characterized by lack of supportive structures for working mothers. Currently, most parliamentary program and sitting times are not adjusted to take into consideration of dual burden that a women carry. Many women who involve in politics had to struggle the balance family life and the demands of work that often involve late hours, much traveling.

Feminist studies of national parliaments and legislatures have revealed the operation of powerful gender norms. The standard operating procedures of parliaments in Britain, Canada, and Australia, for example

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<sup>13</sup> N. Shvedova, "Kendala-kendala Terhadap Partisipasi Perempuan", 37.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-6.

features loud, aggressive and combative behavior, such as screaming, shouting and sneering that can create 'no-win' situation for women. For women who adopt this combative style are ridiculed and patronized by their male counterparts, while women who opt for more demure, consultative and collaborative style are labeled 'weak' or 'unfit' for the job.<sup>15</sup> The writer believes this kind of attitude though maybe a bit mild also happens in Indonesian parliament, but of course it needs further research about how its influence to women's attitude through politics

There was a bit relief for women when Indonesian government changed the election regulation which gives more chance for women to participate in politics. Compare with previous election, election 2004 required party leaders to put at least 30 per cent of women in their candidates list.<sup>16</sup> Before the regulation was set, the selection of candidates by political parties is usually done by small group of officials or party leaders, and they are almost always men. In Indonesia, awareness of gender equality and justice issues is still low. Male potential leaders have a disproportionate influence over political party and women do not receive much support. Political parties tend to put male candidates to be ranked at the top of the party election list. This practice in fact not only happened in Indonesia, studies of political parties in South Asia, Australia, Canada, Europe, Latin America, and the United States have demonstrated that parties that differ from one another in ideological commitments and policy objectives have been remarkably similar and consistent in allowing male gatekeepers to structure candidate selection process to prevent women from being chosen for open, safe and winnable seat in legislative races. Patronage practices within political parties also manifest pervasive gender bias.<sup>17</sup> These kinds of practice, not mentioning the 'men rules' in party such as timing of sitting times, etc and 'men attitude' such as loud, aggressive and combative behavior which relatively exist in any parties may discourage women to enter political arena.

So, there are many sources of obstacles which can hindrance women's participation in politics. However, the writer believes that the main point is the women themselves, especially with the quota system and

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<sup>15</sup> M. Hawkesworth, *Engendering Political Science*, 150-1.

<sup>16</sup> Further about quota system, see further D. Dahlerup, 2002 and RE.Matland 2002.

<sup>17</sup> M. Hawkesworth, *Engendering Political Science*, 150.

the change of one of election regulation about proportion number in relation with counting the voter, women have greater chance than before. Of course, as the consequences women themselves should be ready to compete in the political arena. In this case, the writer believes besides creating a conducive realm in political arena and increasing the level of economy, increasing women's capability is the main solution to improve their representation in politics.

### Enhancing The Representation Of Women In Politics.

Without lessen the value of other strategies whether in relation with political or economical matters, in this paper the writer will focus mostly with the strategy to heighten women's self esteem and self confidence to participate in political activity.

The first and foremost strategy of course through education. Education has a wide impact to every person: it empowers people. Central to the ability to build empowerment are equal capabilities, equal access and agency, and education has a role in building capabilities.<sup>18</sup> Education will lead women to join political parties or participate in political activities. Education is the most important channel for encouraging people to speak out, and through education formal or nonformula women can be encouraged to have interest in politics. A study from Mondal and Anderson, 2004, shows that women are typically less interested in politic than men are. There is a tendency among women to think that politics is simply too complicated for them to understand; they pay less attention to news about politics and they have smaller stock of political knowledge than men.<sup>19</sup> This study in line with the fact proposed by Indah Pariwansa the case of Indonesia. She states that the cultural context in Indonesia is still heavily patriarchal so women tend to comprehend politics as men's world. Research conducted by Dra St Aminah, entitled *Persepsi Wanita Terhadap Politik* shows that women in her research mostly said that politics is not women's world, it is more suitable

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<sup>18</sup> UN Millennium Project, *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women*, Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, (New York: 2005), 33.

<sup>19</sup> G. Elisabeth, O. Brenda, and Y. Lisa, 'Her Mother's Daughter? The Influence of Childhood Socialization on Women's Political Engagement', Paper presented at the Annual meeting of AISA 2008, Massachusetts, August 28 2008, ([http:// www.alacademic.com/meta](http://www.alacademic.com/meta)), 2.

for men, though it does not mean that women should not be involved in it.<sup>20</sup> This kind of perception prevents women from contesting elections and from participating in political life. So, giving them education, more specifically political education, is very urgent. As Delli Carpani and Keeter say in Stolle and Gidengil, education furnishes people with cognitive skills that are needed to acquire and to cope with the complexities of politics. Education also helps to include norms of civic behavior and encourages people to take interest in politics.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to basic education, many women lack of political training required to participate effectively in the political arena. This can be done through giving women access to work patterns that are conducive to political leadership. This can be done since early period of their lives. A research conducted by Elisabeth *et. al* which was conducted through examining the impact of parent's political activity on adult women's political interest, political knowledge and propensity to be involved in both electoral ( e.g. party membership and voting) and non electoral (e.g. demonstration and political consumerism), shows that early exposure to politics in their home can serve to counteract the effect of female socialization. The result demonstrates that a politically active mother can have role model effect and that her influence typically outweighs that of a politically active father.<sup>22</sup> This fact is in line with Dra Aminah's research also states that women perception on politics is influenced by their experience, environment and value in their society.

So, to prepare for more women in politics in the future, women today have a big role whether as role models and or giving education to younger generation. Furthermore, a woman should be prepared for the fact that when she becomes a politician, it does not mean that she should lose her womanhood. It is this womanhood which should be placed first, since it contains different creative potentials and intellectual strength. The ability to make decisions and implement them is not a gender-specific trait, but a common human one; in other words, a man holding power is natural, and a

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<sup>20</sup> *Suara Pembaharuan*, 17 September 1997.

<sup>21</sup> D. Stolle, and E Gidengil, *What do Women Really know? A gendered Analysis of Varieties of Political Knowledge*, Paper presented for the Annual Conference of Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 3-6-2008, (<http://www.alacademic.com.meta>), 1-2.

<sup>22</sup> G. Elisabeth, O. Brenda, and Y. Lisa, "Her mothers's Daughter?".

woman holding power is natural too or ought to be. Women should believe that they are equal to and have the same potential as men, but only they can fight for their rights. Women are very good campaigners, organizers and support-mobilizers, but they rarely contest parliamentary posts. All of this concept can be introduced to women and girls through free gendered bias education.

### Conclusion

It requires a long struggle for Indonesian women to have a representative number in political arena. Women under representation is a problem for it is unfair for the sake of justice, equity and human rights. The urgent of the representation of women and the inclusion of their perspective and experience into the decision process will inevitably lead to solution that are more viable and satisfy a broader range of society. There are many obstacles which come from different sources whether psychological problems, low level of education and economic, political system or mass media. Women who have made the decision to stand for election should take all of these circumstances into consideration. These obstacles need to be handled systematically especially in relation with the women's psychological problems about politics. Through education women may boost their confidence and self esteem to play roles in politics. With confidence and determination women can reach the highest levels in the political process.

Besides creating a conducive atmosphere for women participation in politic, women themselves should have self confidence and able to ignore the negative stereotypes which labeled to them. They should believe that they are equal to and have the same potential as men, but only they can fight for their rights. By educating them and making them realize the importance of their participation in politics, it will open the path wider for Indonesian women to participate in Indonesian politics.

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